

Exploring Surrealism by filmmaking methods
focusing on senses/haptic visuality

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Abstract

Since the Surrealist movement eschews the usual strategies of a definition based on style or genre, there is no one formula for making Surrealist art that will ever be universally approved or justified as such. Instead, Surrealism can be understood as more of a spirit, a viewpoint, a way of seeing the world and feeling the world from a different and ever-changing perspectives. The difficulty of clearly defining *Surrealism* has affected scholars of all disciplines, for example, Chadwick refers to artists as being “associated with Surrealism” (WA 10). Therefore, I will identify the work produced for this PhD, as filmmaking creativity *influenced by* a Surrealist world view, ideas and practices, rather than labelling the films as Surrealist.

This PhD by practice also experiments with filmmaking methods which centre around notions of Haptic visuality, and generally draw on the importance of the senses.

The seven films that make up my portfolio of practical work for this PhD: *Ghosts* (2011), *Polednice/The Noon Witch* (2012), *Necropolis: A Walk through the Graveyard* (2014), *The Secret Life of Moths* (2013), *Nightmare on a Train* (2016), *Blackbird* (2016) and *Mortido* (2017), demonstrate that tactile images not only help in expressing Surreality through the personal senses, but also invite the imagination of the viewers’ embodied experience.

These films were influenced by Surrealist practices, such as utilising dreams, chance, collaboration, altered states of the mind, transformations and creating new myths.

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Abbreviations

CNW: *The Czechoslovak New Wave*

C1: *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*

C2: *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*

F: *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*

CD: *Civilization and Its Discontents*

CU: *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art,
Literature, Love, Religion*

ID: *The Interpretation of Dreams*

MS: *Manifestoes of Surrealism*

N: *Nadja*

NM: *Surrealism, Cinema, and the Search for a New Myth*

SF: *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*

T: *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*

TE: *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*

TI: *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art*

WA: *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*

WS: *What Is Surrealism?*

Introduction

Formulating Research Questions

The interest in Surrealism for this PhD by practice stems from a sense that its lens can guide interesting experimentation in filmmaking, through the focus on experience and connection to the less logical and more mysterious aspects of reality. It is the suggestive quality of film, activating the audiences' imagination, even beyond what the film shows, that is essential for this thesis. For example, the films referred to as Surrealist by artists such as Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, Jan Švankmajer or Alejandro Jodorowsky, have their own unique style, but all share a sense of evoking a certain strangeness, a disorientation of what is, where anything is possible and not as expected. Audiences are often shaken and surprised, for example, when film characters engage with objects or inhabit spaces in ways that challenge the viewers' sensory expectations. Švankmajer's *Alice/Něco z Alenky* (1988), an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), which specifically focuses on the distortion of logical reality, serves as a great example of this effect. As even the drawer of a cabinet can become a passageway to another world, in the felt experience of our embodied viewing, as we imagine squeezing through the tight space. Jan Švankmajer holds the view that film can activate the viewers' imagination via images that focus on a sense of touch, which can arguably make even the most abstract and illogical possibilities a sort of felt reality. Since film as a medium has the advantage of illustrating time and space, it can also manipulate and distort it, for example, in the way that it is shot, lit, and through enhancements introduced by editing and sound. Film can, just as in dreams and in the distorted experience felt during alternative mental states, experiment with a multi-sensory understanding of

reality. In this light, this project finds film a fitting art form for exploring and testing out the philosophical notions of Surrealism and contemplating existential questions on human existence and experience.

This project poses the following research question. Firstly, if Surrealist concepts such as the marvellous, the poetic image or the Surrealist object can be perceived and expressed by drawing the attention towards sensory qualities, can the focus on the sensory serve as a possible guide in filmmaking with a Surrealist intention and help communicate the Surrealist effect to the audience?

Another question for this thesis comes from learning that when engaging with Surrealism, women artists often employed certain strategies, such as: focusing on “internal dialogism” (Raaberg 5); “revers[ing] the male and female positions within the dialogue” (5-6); consciously representing “the ‘feminine’ as Other”; or aiming to dissolve “binary oppositions toward a discourse- a mythology and an iconography- based on women’s own psychology and experiences” (6). Are any of these strategies present in my PhD films? Can a specific focus on the sensory quality and effect in these films offer a more universal perspective shared by all individuals? Furthermore, do any of the films of this project succeed in inducing the uncanny quality of the marvellous and if so, how? Finally, what are the results of engaging with Surrealist practices?

PhD Film Synopses

These following films are available on www.vimeo.com/miskamorning.

Ghosts (2011) is a tactile montage exploring collaborative improvisations, centred around perceived and expressed sensory phobias and pleasures associated with touch and touching. The experiment also aimed to blur the imagined and the real, as well as serve as a homage to Jan Švankmajer’s film, *Kostnice/Ossuary* (1970).

Polednice/The Noon Witch (2012), named after the 19th century Czech folklore poem of Karel Jaromír Erben, is a film influenced by the passing on of the tale through different family members, impacting on the personal imagination and becoming a new myth altogether. The film also aimed to engage the Surrealist concept of blurring different realms, and experimented with the merging of the filmmaker's, film's and the viewer's perspective. The props were influenced by the notion of the Surrealist object, as instead of their expected utility, they are possibly created by a hidden desire, and are magical, transformative and often connect and blur both the outside and inside; imagined and real.

Necropolis: A Walk Through the Graveyard (2014) experiments with chance in the mode of a flâneur/ flâneuse. Furthermore, the film connects the internal with the external reality. Inspired by André Breton's *Nadja* (1928), which is predominantly an observation of Nadja's wanderings, this film is shot from the experience of the wondering 'soul in limbo'. The object/ shadow of the filmmaker is the subject of embodiment, guiding the camera through the space.

The Secret Life of Moths (2013) uses movement and choreography to explore the contradicting emotions in a relationship with our body and gender identity. Exposing the binary thinking of feminine and masculine qualities, depicted by the ever-changing state between their tension and their union.

Nightmare on a Train (2016) analogically illustrates the experience of hypnagogia. Furthermore, the film focuses on a trance-like quality, inducing the experience of daydreaming, for example, as the mind interjects the reality seen from a moving train.

Blackbird (2016) explores the disassociation between mind and body as the character transforms into a bird, connecting the un-connectable. Furthermore, the film is influenced by Freud's notion of sublimation and repressed desire. The

props, set and the costumes are all based on a dream. The film also explores the manifest and the latent concerning the character, but also the dream that inspired the film.

Mortido (2017) is an exploration of the experiencing of reality affected by trauma. Furthermore, the altered state of mind was used in the process of filmmaking, which led the otherwise improvised project. The film also demonstrates that a mental breakdown can often bridge different experiences of life and reality via memories and imagination, while serving as a transformative process in the reconstruction of history and the self, by creating a fairy tale to overcome a traumatic event.

Methodology

The thesis is divided into three research areas:

The first chapter focuses on Surrealism: contextualizing the movement's fundamental concepts, such as the poetic image and the marvellous; and highlighting key strategies and practices undertaken by the Surrealists. Furthermore, this chapter establishes the views on the film medium from the members of the Surrealist Group, as well as from the perspective of key film theoreticians, to tease out the aspects that make certain films to be considered Surrealist.

The second chapter recognises that the sensory and tactile quality in film is unintentionally significant in my practice, and in engaging with the concepts of Surrealism. Since the Surrealist philosophy seeks to experience reality beyond the way we think based on logic or counting on scientific evidence, it seems appropriate to include an alternative methodology rooted in existential Phenomenology. Kristopher Noheden's study, focusing on the role of the

imagination of touch (the surrealist tactility) in Jan Švankmajer's films, demonstrates its effects on the embodiment of the viewer. Furthermore, recognising the strong attention to sensory/ tactile quality present in my filmmaking, this chapter aims to find a meaning for such tendency. The notion of visual tactility (haptic visuality), in Laura Mark's *SF*, and the views on the role of the viewer's embodiment in Jennifer Barker's *TE*, not only inform my approach to filmmaking, but also resonate with Surrealism, for example with the methods of some Surrealist artists, as well as echo with the movement's ideas and attitudes. Finally, the third chapter explains and demonstrates how the individual PhD films engage with the sensory and haptic, together with a variety of Surrealist ideas and practices and how they crucially intertwine in the practice.

Chapter 1: Surrealism

Historical Contextualising of Surrealism

ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. (Breton, *MS* 26)

Surrealism found its roots in 1919 Paris, formed by a group of intellectuals feeling the effects of “[t]he First World War [which] destroyed any belief they had in the ‘civilising mission’ of Western culture” (Richardson 16). The Surrealist Group blamed this culture for banishing “from the mind every-thing that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy [and] any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices” (Breton, *MS* 10). Marcel Duchamp's nihilist statement, “we all share the feeling that our scientific faith lacks something- that reality is nowhere to be found” encapsulates this feeling (Richter 90). A core aim of Surrealism was to attack any binary thinking suggesting a “distinction between the beautiful and the ugly, true and false, good and evil” (Breton, *MS* 125). The *First Surrealist Manifesto* was published in 1924, with Philippe Soupault and André Breton “baptiz[ing] the new mode of pure expression”, as a “homage” to Guillaume Apollinaire, who first used the term in 1917 (Breton, *MS* 24). The fundamental aim of those associated with the manifesto, was to expose the oppressive attitude ingrained in the order of logic and which is embedded in us as self-censorship. For this reason, Surrealist art turned instead to irrationality, chaos, dreams and taboos, juxtaposing anything unconnectable, disorientating the laws of logic, and devaluing any traditional or sacred position. The effect of displacement, such as is evident in Dalí's objects, was aimed at upsetting their expected “aesthetic and utility” precisely to “discredit

our limited and highly ordered understanding of the material world” (Malt 116). As Ramona Fotiade notes, the power of the Surrealist object lies in the ability to “trigger perceptual distortions” (“Ready-made” 12). Therefore, the aim of the Surrealists was to challenge, question and make new connections, even between what feels unconnectable. Breton uses Reverdy's phrase to define the Surrealist poetic image, as “a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities” (MS 20). The effect of such images “creates a poetic 'spark' through its bypassing of habitual perception” (Noheden, NM 18). For example, placing a prop, a set or a character in a film out of the expected context, can feel humorous or uncomfortable, and it can even lead us to question why we, the viewers, feel this way.

The Surrealists also “aimed to recreate links with primal thoughts and emotions in order to recast human needs away from materialism, mass culture and social order towards immersion in the revolutionary hagiography of mankind's dark side” (Harper and Stone 2-3). Buñuel's film *L'Âge d'Or* (1930), a result of the collaborative ideas of The French Surrealist Group, depicts characters who are indifferent to social obligations and are thus free from fearing consequences. They act upon their sexual desires and violent urges, in the precise liberated manner that one is free to act when in a dream state. However, it is not that the Surrealists were amoral, as František Dryje noted, the group aspired to “a general humanistic morality” detached from oppressive institutions (own translation 85). Breton, the leading writer of the French Surrealist Group, believed in a type of “moral asepsis”, which bypasses the oppressive model that “certain things ‘are’, while others, which well might be, ‘are not’” (MS 187).

Furthermore, while Surrealism was “interested in exploding the holistic social order, it was also deeply committed to personal psychology” (Harper and Stone 3). Breton witnessed the alternative individual experience of reality through his observations of a soldier in WWI, who believed that “the war is a sham and the bullets are only dummies, the wounds are merely makeup and the dead are taken from hospitals and distributed at night across the phony battlefield” (00:01:28-49)¹. The psychoanalytic findings of Sigmund Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), which suggested that dream analysis can reveal the “knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind” (*ID* 604), offered a theoretical credence to the Surrealists’ interest in this enigmatic realm; the subconscious. In the view of psychoanalysis, hidden desires express themselves “not only in dreams but also in hysterical phobias” (Freud, *ID* 608). The Surrealists particularly aligned with Freud’s concept, which Breton refers to as ‘Sublimation’ and cites and interprets it in the ‘Second Manifesto’ as the “repression” of one’s desires into a “fantasy life”, to fulfil what cannot be carried out in “our actual existence”, however, if one is unsuccessful, then “the person (...) retires into the happier world of his dreams” or if sick, becomes symptomatic. (Breton, *MS* 160). Moreover, Breton cites and interprets Freud’s Sublimation further, adding that if a person is creatively gifted, they can transform their dreams “into artistic creations”, and thus “escape the fate of neurosis”, through making “contact with reality” (*ibid.*). However, the Surrealists often applied their own take on Psychoanalysis, and Hall Foster notes their different engagement with hypnosis and interpretation of dreams (2). Still, Freud brought to light this enigmatic part of the mind, the unconscious, which the Surrealists felt was responsible for imagination and inspiration, especially when exceptionally experienced and

¹ from Mike Gold’s documentary *Europe After the Rain* (1978).

heightened by mental abnormalities. Freeing inspiration from “the desire to make sense”, and from “any ideas of responsibility” (Breton, *MS* 162), was believed to hold “a key capable of opening indefinitely that box of many bottoms called man” (163). Therefore, the dream was an interesting realm for Surrealism to explore, offering a space in which experience is often beyond interpretation. Freud’s work on dreams suggested that the impossible scenarios found in dreams are the result of our repressed desires manifesting into our consciousness in the form of distortions fulfilling “conflictual wishes” (Foster 2). However, there is no way to prove the real meaning of the latent material or the unconscious. More importantly, the Surrealists, unlike Freud, predominantly focused on capturing the nonsensical manifest elements of dreams for creativity, rather than seeking a cure or any definite, deciphered meanings of the latent, which remain secret. The artist Giorgio De Chirico had already discussed this importance of the nonsensical imagination of dreams and childhood in 1913. He suggested that an image “which means *absolutely nothing* from the logical point of view”, inspires creative activity in triggering “such agony or joy, that we feel compelled to paint” (De Chirico 402). In the case of this PhD project, the initial inspiration for my creative imagination, described further in the third chapter, is as follows: thoughts and visual ideas often appeared in dreams, by chance, or when in a trance-like state, without logical meaning, beyond words, and more as a sensory feeling. Freud’s psychoanalytic discoveries also inspired the Surrealists to try no longer obeying what Freud identified as the *ego* and the *superego*, but instead to seek the freedom of the *id* (Breton, *MS* 232), which they felt could be employed in manifesting these hidden instincts in nonsensical art. Interestingly, Hall Foster argues that the Surrealists were essentially concerned with the concept of the uncanny, and seeking the “return of the repressed”, but primarily, in order to

“redirect this return to critical ends” (xvii), as they were mainly “drawn to its manifestations” (xviii). The Surrealists, according to Foster, exploited the Freudian notion, desiring only the power of “the uncanny return of the repressed for disruptive purposes”, while, for example, ignoring “its consequences regarding the death drive” (21). In his essay *The Uncanny* (1919), Freud associates the notion with “all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (CU 122), as a disturbing feeling, which “leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (123-124). Before Freud, Ernst Jentsch ascribed the uncanny “to intellectual uncertainty” and to not knowing “where one is” (Freud, CU 124), or “whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate” (132). As discussed further in this thesis, this project also aligns and tends towards understanding the Surrealist notion of the marvellous in close connection to both Freud’s and Jentsch’s associations with the uncanny, as both uncertainty and the power of experiencing the return of the repressed arguably play roles in the Surrealist practice.

Principal Tenets and Methods of Surrealism

The Freudian study of the subconsciousness and practice of free associating influenced the Surrealist practice. Freud proposes, that the unconsciousness is the functioning “of two separate systems”, one that we cannot access (the unconsciousness), and one that is a partition, the (the pre-consciousness) system, but which can reach the consciousness (ID 609). Breton interprets and cites this view, as the mental material becomes preconscious “thanks to the association with the corresponding verbal representations”, and these “mnemonic traces stemming principally from acoustic perceptions”, are “the raw material of poetry” (MS 230). For this reason, Breton initially believes that through

the method of automatic writing, one would be capable of retrieving the material of the unconscious to the preconscious. Interestingly, the poet, Tristan Tzara had already recognised that “words bear a burden of meaning designed for practical use and do not readily submit to a process of random arrangement” (Richter 54). Therefore, utilising ‘chance’, can be a way to try bypass this control, for example, by cutting words out of newspapers, and mixing and shaking them in a bag (ibid.). The method of Automatism aimed to “set the flow from a spring that one need only go search for fairly deep down within oneself, a flow whose course one cannot try to direct, for if one does it is sure to dry up immediately” (Breton, *MS* 298). Therefore, one does not “invent or consciously assist the emergence of such images but rather seems to come across them unintentionally” (Harper and Stone 10). The Automatic method thus proposed a communication beyond language (Breton, *MS* 38), and a perspective from which to see new connections between things and “wherein its desires are made manifest, where the pros and cons are constantly consumed” (37). Also, in this light, the Surrealists “believe that myth and poetry, conceived as magic [...] reveal facets of the world which reason alone cannot discover” (Noheden, *NM* 18).

SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner-the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern. (Breton, *MS* 26)

However, this suggestion of being unsystematic, in order to bypass conscious thought, can ironically become a conscious practice, as the process can solely focus on the technique, rather than its outcome. Breton later admits, that the majority of those practising Automatic writing “let their pens run rampant over the paper without making the least effort to observe what was going on inside themselves” (*MS* 158). They instead focused on the “disassociation” in the

method, because it was “easier to grasp and more interesting to consider than that of reflected writing”, or of searching for the interaction of the “more or less arbitrarily, oneirical elements” (ibid.). Furthermore, Breton concludes, that Automatic writing “proved that very few neologisms show up, and that this continual flow brought about neither syntactic dismemberment nor disintegration of vocabulary” (MS 298-299). The purpose of Automatism aims at teasing out the secrets that possibly exist in the realm of unconscious, “to emancipate them and restore all their power” (Breton, MS 297). However, Breton recognises, that there was no way of discerning from the products, “which were genuine, and which were spurious imitations”, as there is no means of evidencing “the unconscious thought” (Lomas and Stubbs 183). Foster even suggests, “that automatism might not be liberatory at all [...] because it decentred the subject too radically in relation to the unconscious”, and actually often revealed the unconscious as “conflicted, instinctually repetitive” (4-5). Lomas and Stubbs propose, that the Surrealists' automatic methods merely simulate the work of the unconscious (183). In the visual art practice, those such as André Masson, Joan Miró and Max Ernst, document employing the chance principle, to activate inspiration and then allowing the surprising images to enhance their conscious imagination. Masson describes his experiments with Automatic drawing, as letting pure chance decide the direction and shape of the project, but consequently after the work appeared, it tended to be strangely familiar, in “suggestions of figures or objects”, he was then encouraging their meaning consciously (Gold 00:31:21-43). Miro notes, that the form created by chance “gives me an idea, this idea evokes another form, and everything culminates in figures, animals, and things I had no way of foreseeing in advance”, and “nobody is more surprised than I at what comes out” (Peter pars. 4, 7). Ernst also describes the collage of a displaced vacuum cleaner

and a canoe in a forest, as a “complete transmutation, followed by a pure act, as that of love [...] *the coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance, upon a plane which apparently does not suit them*” which will pass “into a new absolute value, true and poetic” (“Collage” 427). Similarly, Kaplan illustrates Remedios Varo’s painting *Composition* (1935), as “a composite of images flowing seamlessly one into the next with no narrative structure beyond what the juxtaposition of elements suggests” (37-38). However, Ernst believes, that his drawings dip into the unconscious mind, and that they “revealed the first cause of the obsession, or produced a simulacrum of that cause” (“On Frottage” 429). This PhD project appreciates the use of chance principle, for creating surprising elements and releasing inspiration, in a manner fitting with Breton’s description as “this ideal moment when man, in the grips of a particular emotion, is suddenly seized by this something stronger than himself” (MS 161-162). However, as described by Miro and Masson, the conscious associations were allowed in the creative process of making these films. Additionally, this project abandoned the focus on any definite deciphering of the latent material (any surprising and enigmatic elements), as over time, new edited versions shaped the projects and their meanings further. As Joan Miró notes “it took just a moment to draw this line with the brush. But it took me months, perhaps even years, of reflection to form the idea” (Peter par. 2).

Breton also defines Surrealism beyond contradictions, as a resolution, capable of blurring any different perspectives of existence. For Surrealism, attempts “to deepen the foundations of the real, to bring about an even clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses”, aiming to reinforce the relationship with reality, by merging the “interior

reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, or finally becoming one" (Breton, *WS* 49-50). This "surrealist experience of reality as something more than what meets the eye, or the intrusion of the imaginary in the everyday" is the marvellous (Noheden, *NM* 100), the powerful notion, capable of revealing things, as fundamentally "differing from what ideologies dictate it to be" (Allmer 13). Noheden writes, that the power of the marvellous is recognised, for example, by Péret as "the capacity of the imagination to interpret and transform the surrounding world", akin to the view of the esoterically minded Mabille, as the "conjunction of desire and external reality"/ "the intermingling of mind and matter" (*NM* 99-100). The Surrealist practice aims to transform contradictory states "into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality" (Breton, *MS* 14), where "a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions" (123). The *Manifesto* states: "there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real" in the sense of unification (Breton, *MS* 15). Thus, the Surrealist marvellous can be viewed as "a methodological principle, or a tool by which reality can be judged" (Richardson 20). Breton's marvellous is revealed to us only in its fragments, such as "the romantic *ruins*, the modern *mannequin*, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time" (*MS* 16). These examples unify contradictions, for example: past and present, man-made and nature, life and death. The meaning of the French word "*la merveille*" originally stood for the power "to astonish and surprise", describing phenomena contradicting "habitual daily experience", and suggesting "other, more occult, forces might be operating in the universe" (Lomas and Stubbs xxi). The word was also associated with "fairy stories" and "religious enthusiasm and belief in miracles" (ibid. xxi). Interestingly, Foster equates the marvellous with the

notion of 'the uncanny', arguing, that contradictions "only come together in the experience of the uncanny" (xviii-xix). He proposes, to view the principle "in terms of repetition that governs the uncanny and the death drive", since "convulsive beauty and objective chance, connote shock", and a "traumatic experience" may be involved, as well as "an attempt to work through" it, via repetition (Foster 21). Furthermore, the uncanny, as a confusion, for example, of the animate with inanimate, evokes the realisation that death is immanent (ibid.). Therefore, Foster amends Breton's view of the marvellous as the beautiful, to argue the involvement of "an uncanny return or the repressed" (23). Lomas and Stubbs also highlight the role of the uncanny, but in reference to Ernst Jentsch, as "the simulacrum and the epistemological doubt that it introduces into the order of the real" (xxiv). Jentsch's marvellous as a simulation can be found, for example, in "hysteria", "natural mimicry" (camouflage) and the "simulacra of the human (automata, waxworks figurines, shop mannequins)" (Lomas and Stubbs xxii-xxiii). The darker view of the marvellous suggests, that our imagination can unintentionally also manifest that which, relates to the origin of our fears, or a trauma, we repressed. Arguably, the sense of uncertainty plays a crucial role in feeling the marvellous too, both as fusing contradictions and as being undetermined. Lomas and Stubbs argue, that doubt is "one of the main manifestations of the uncanny", and it is produced in Surrealism, "wherever there is confusion between representation and reality" (xxiv).

Significantly, *The First Manifesto* proposes, that children and those who fell "victims of their imaginations" (the mentally ill) (Breton, *MS* 4-5) are natural Surrealists. For Freud, the ego firstly "includes everything", but "later it detaches from itself the external world" (*CD* 4). Helaine Posner proposes the contrasts

“between reality and fantasy - our boundaries - are constructions”, drawing on Storch’s writings on Schizophrenia (159), who explains the ego in psychosis, is “no longer [...] distinct from the object” and “the self and the world” are united “in an inseparable total complex” (Storch 31). Essentially, the poets and artists of the Surrealist movement aim to tap into such a unique experience and imagination, and thus often turn to simulating “a disordered state of mind”, for example, Dali’s paranoiac-critical method (Posner 160). For Foster, the “paranoid-critical method” and “the city as array of anxious signs” are indeed forms of “traumatic neurosis”, using compulsive repetition “to master trauma, to transform the anxious into the aesthetic, the uncanny into the marvellous” (48). Furthermore, since Freud’s study of hysteria predominantly associates psychological disorders with women, the Surrealists thus perceive young women in a special light, as inspirations and muses. The *femme-enfants* were believed to be capable of unique creativity, as “the naïve woman-child whose spontaneous innocence, uncorrupted by logic or reason, brings her into closer contact with the intuitive realm of unconscious” (Kaplan 56). Aragon and Breton even publish “photographs showing women patients in ecstatic states”, in a quest to raise “the status of Hysteria from mental illness to a poetic precept” as “*a supreme means of expression*” (Chadwick, WA 35). Chadwick proposes, that Breton actually identified women with “qualities that man recognizes as important but does not wish to possess himself” (WA 35). Perhaps the male Surrealists “*wanted* to be hysterics, to be by turns passive and convulsive, *disponible* and ecstatic”, and possibly “*were*”, for example, in being “marked by traumatic fantasy, confused about sexual identity” (Foster 53-54). Furthermore, Foster finds Breton’s novels to exhibit “the compulsive repetition”, which he proposes to relate to Freud’s uncanny and to the death drive principle, as a way of dealing with “the loss of the love object”, or in preparing “for a shock

[...] in traumatic neurosis”, and in re-enacting “the repressed” (1993: 32). The Japanese Surrealist artist, Yayoi Kusama, “a self-professed ‘visionary mad woman’” (Chadwick, “Mirrors” 19), explains, that her signature theme of repetition stems from “the hallucinations that plagued her as a child and have persisted throughout her life” (Posner 160). Furthermore, Foster’s notion of being ‘haunted by repetition’, as if contemplating a forgotten past, can also be found in the PhD films, for example, the objects, places and the experience of being, echoes the ‘haunting’ Foster refers to in Breton’s *Nadja* (30). Therefore, Foster’s view fits not only with Kusama’s practice, but also with the PhD films, which employ both repetition and possible substitution in the process of self-knowledge and in the overcoming of trauma.

The Surrealist practices were also often adapted by other artists and sometimes diverged from Breton’s theory. The journal *Dyn* (1942-44) describes the work of artist Wolfgang Robert Paalen, who tended towards totemic art and “uses dreams instrumentally in order to establish contacts with his childhood”, as those moments where “his involvement with temporary and spatial points of reference disappears- when sunset and sunrise merge- he simultaneously travels through his own life toward the readings and the visions of his childhood” (Hubert 238). In a more positive light, Breton also notes, that “[t]he mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood” (MS 39). This PhD film practice demonstrates the act of plunging into the darker parts of childhood memory, as with Paalen, by employing consciousness and exploring childhood vision, but remains closer to Foster’s arguments relating to trauma. The Surrealist interest in dreams and in-between states is documented in Breton’s experience of drifting off to sleep, when an illogical phrase accompanied

by the “visual image of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body” appeared in his mind, leading to his belief that he was experiencing the manifestation of a “spoken thought” (MS 21-23). This experience inspired the recording of illogical juxtapositions during the night after awakening from dreams or caused by hypnagogic encountering. *Nightmare on a Train*, for example, is inspired by the uncomfortable experience of hypnagogic uncertainty in being asleep or awake and in hallucinating, and the appearance of unusual and illogical thoughts inspired the ideas behind the film. Additionally, discovering the scientist and artist Fariba Bogzaran, who pioneered the research of lucid dreaming, served as a further inspiration in using dreams for creativity. In one of her talks, Bogzaran described experiencing a transition through various stages of consciousness into a space, where sharpness and the realistic forms of our awake reality cease, and where one instead experiences abstract visuals, beyond definition, such as white or black light in a deconstructed atom-like structure of the world.² Conducting her research over 35 years, Bogzaran uses lucid dreaming practice in producing her visual art, as well as in developing an alternative healing therapy. Furthermore, meeting Bogzaran in person has inspired a future collaboration, in which lucid dreaming will be employed in the making of an upcoming film project.

In conclusion, the Surrealist practice sought “to reform the arts”, by the “intense experience”, evidenced by the group “using psychotropics, by wandering the streets of the city until one gets lost in a trance, by experimenting with occult methods (such as the séance and *tables-tournantes*), by giving themselves over

² Fariba Bogzaran, (ISSS), the 2nd conference of the International Society for the Study of Surrealism, August, 2019, Exeter.

to automatist possession, and by recalling dreams so vividly that dreaming would become a part of waking life” (Elder 261-262). Importantly for this project being film based, the Surrealists recognise a special power in cinema, “allied with dreams and hallucinations—the very realms in which consciousness operates most intensely” (Elder 262). This project practiced a variety of the discussed methods, such as seeking inspiration in dreams, utilising the chance principle in editing and via collaboration, but also in the synchronicities and the flaneur wandering. Furthermore, the Film practice also illustrates the employing of altered states of mind, when impacted by bereavement. This part of the research also highlights, Foster's *Compulsive Beauty* (1993) and offering a darker perspective on Surrealism, foregrounding the use of Freud's notion of the uncanny as one of the primal Surrealist qualities. For example, the suggestion that the uncanny plays a part in the “anxious crossings of contrary states, as hysterical confusings of different identities”, and the invocation of “past and/or fantasmatic traumas” (Foster xix). Furthermore, as Noheden illustrates in *NM*, the Surrealists are also interested in creating new mythology, as well as use analogy to recover the powerful “repressed knowledge” (*NM* 17).

Female Strategies in Engaging with Surrealism

Being a female artist and coming across the knowledge, of the woman as being a symbol for Surrealism (the muse, the hysteric), provoked an interest in how to address this notion in my film practice, and investigate how other female artists engage with this discourse. This research led me to the realization, that women artists were largely ignored in books written on Surrealism until the 1980s. However, works such as *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1991), *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-representation* (1998) and

Surrealism and Women (1991) highlight that women were present and active from the beginning of the movement, gravitating to its radical nature during the modernist period. Since Surrealism aimed to challenge oppressive systems, artists such as Buñuel, Dali and Benjamin Péret applied it, for example, in targeting the police, the church and the state, while women often opposed the controlling ties posed on them “by family, class, and [patriarchal] society” (Chadwick, WA 11). For example, Leonora Carrington’s work strongly hints a desire to liberate herself from the repression of society and “to overcome the impact of authority figures and patriarchy” (Hubert 115). The young woman, of

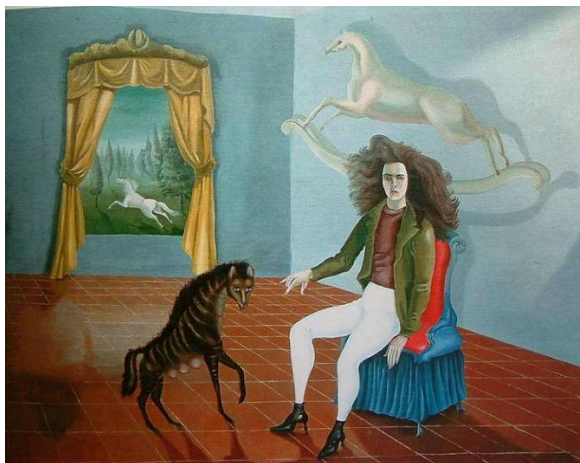


Figure 1 Leonora Carrington, *Self-Portrait* (1936-37).

her story *The Debutante* (1939), rebels against the expectations of her family and society, by sending a masked hyena to the traditional ‘find husband’ ball, instead of herself. Carrington’s *Self-Portrait* (1936-37), illustrates her modern take on female

identity, dressed in riding trousers, flat chested, in an ‘unladylike’ opened legged posture, evoking the female as powerful. Chadwick calls Surrealism “the first modernist movement in which a group of women could explore female subjectivity and give form (however tentatively) to a feminine imaginary” (“Mirrors” 5). Furthermore, the Surrealist principles aim to collapse “binary oppositions of mind/body, rational/irrational, art/nature”, and such break from having distinct qualities attracted women, whom society placed in “an inferior position” by associating the feminine with passivity (Raaberg 8). The male Surrealists already asserted their “identity as subject, ‘masterful creator’ and ‘tortured soul’, whilst women were mostly represented as objects” (Allmer 16). Therefore, in order “to

reclaim [their] passivising representation” and “inscribe the female artist into the genre of surrealism” (Allmer 16), the female artists have to address the female role in a way, that can help them reach the same privileged freedom of the male artist (Chadwick, *WA* 7). Therefore, the female Surrealist tends to focus away “from the magical Other” and towards her “own reality” (Chadwick, *WA* 74), exploring the relationship with the ‘Self’ and with her body, as a “subjective experience that is consciously female” (Chadwick, “Foreword” ix). For example, the artist Penny Slinger notes her investigation of Surrealism using her female position in photographic collages, introducing “the muse as her own subject (as opposed to object)” (Slinger interview).

[i]n one sense, all Surrealist paintings are self-portraits, their sources internal rather than external, their imagery indistinguishable from the structure and functioning of their creators’ minds, their goal self-knowledge, but very few of those by male artists contain recognizable self-images. (Chadwick, *WA* 66)

Dali is an example of a male artist who focuses on the subjective self, “on his own image, consciously cultivating narcissism as an aberrant mental state”, but only to be used “for its rich imagery, and then dropped” (ibid.). Female artists on the other hand, arguably often use their experiences or mental disorder in art more personally. Kaplan notes that women find the “search for a merging of inner and outer realities an irresistible challenge” (Kaplan 57). Madeleine Cottenet-Hage finds the work of women associated with Surrealism usually explores the female reality with their bodily experiences, often “hinging upon [...] the inside/outside opposition” (77). Artists such as Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Ana Mendieta, Francesca Woodman and Yayoi Kusama, use their bodies to bridge and explore the relationship of the self with the material space around them. It can also be argued, that in some cases, women reverse the scenario with the male inspiration/muse. For example, Carrington’s fascination with Max Ernst and

with the controversial doctor from her time in a mental asylum, as both of these men reoccur in her creative work as mystical figures. The PhD films *Mortido*, *Polednice* and *Blackbird* also bring to light that I use men as guiding inspirations and on reflection, though unintentionally, illustrate the male figure as ‘the Other’, in being fragmented and passive. In these films, the threat and power belong to the androgynous/ female figures, such as, the *Polednice* witch and the Angel of Death in *Mortido*, who are intended more as symbols for nature, death, the universe, or possibly the unconscious. Interestingly, Varo also illustrates female characters as “androgynous” and omnipotent (Kaplan 156), yet, she also depicts



Figure 2 Eileen Agar, *Angel of Anarchy* (1936-1940).

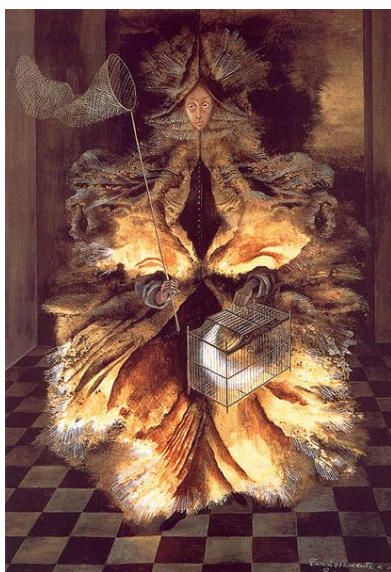


Figure 3 Remedios Varo, *Star Catcher* (1956).

haunted females in places of danger, where mysterious and threatening figures lurk not only in alleyways, but even inside their furniture, which, according to Kaplan stem from “personalization, an expression of [Varo’s] own fears” (158). Similarly, the illustration of a hypnagogic state in *Nightmare on the Train*, depicts a tortured woman and stands for my subjective (female) experience with fear. In fact, this research found that other women in Surrealism also illustrate a terrifying and powerful female character in their work. For example, Agar’s *Angel of Anarchy* (1936-40), Varo’s *Star Catcher* (1956) and Carrington’s *Giantess* (1950), are all goddess like figures, whose power is linked to the control of nature. Patricia Allmer notes, that Eileen Agar’s sculpture *Angel of Anarchy* addresses issues of gender identity by “enacting a man’s becoming-

woman” illustrating “hybridity and becoming” (26). Additionally, Lee Miller’s angel



Figure 4 Lee Miller, *Revenge on Culture* (1940).

in *Revenge on Culture* (1940) and the angel in Emila Medkova’s *Untitled* (1948) also introduce a new “representation of femininity and self”, challenging the patriarchal way of seeing and thinking, by depicting the object of man’s desire as one that “no longer awakens but is destroyed”

(Allmer 17). Furthermore, the artist Claude Cahun, who possibly identified with a nonbinary identity, illustrates gender in her photographs, as both a construct and a mask, revealing “identity as endless becoming, which can be shaped, re-shaped and changed, rather than being” (ibid.). In *Polednice*, the witch is played by a male actor, with the intention to present a figure beyond a set gender identification, while the gender of the androgynous Angel of Death in *Mortido* is often questioned by the viewers. The strategies employed by women artists associated with Surrealism are thus also arguably present in this PhD practice. Additionally, *Polednice* and *Mortido* illustrate my subjective female psychology and experience. *The Secret Life of Moths* attempts to dissolve the binary thinking of male/female as separate entities, and the question of complex identity is further employed in the merging of human/animal in *Blackbird*. *Nightmare on a Train* represents the feminine self as the Other, where the tortured object personifies personal fears and is watched, trapped and passive. While *Necropolis: A Walk Through the Graveyard* explores the embodied female experience and depicting both the object and the subject in unity.

However, using the self too literally in art also raises a dilemma in how to obtain the level of objectivity which the Surrealists pursued. For example, “by focusing

on the imagination's role to the exclusion of all else, the Surrealists would have risked suggesting that the surreality they sought was subjective", but they were "a dialectical syn-thesis of subjectivity and objectivity" and therefore, applying chance, served as "the dialectical counterbalance to the imagination's subjectivity" (Elder 312). Furthermore, Breton explains, that the "condition of objectivity in art is that it appears to be detached from every specific circle of ideas and forms", for only then can it be "totally human", and "subjectivity" ceases the "living focal point from which it can radiate outward", and which connects "to the depths of [all individuals'] hearts" (MS 220-222). The emotional charge should be used indirectly, yet he writes, if it is "very deep and very keen", it can strengthen "that living focus" (Breton, MS 222). However, art can trigger a very powerful subjective memory, (illustrated by the beautiful rainbow) which triggers Breton's "earliest memories, to the very first emotions of my childhood" and revealing "the discovery of mystery, beauty, fear" and the understanding of the self (MS 223). The artist Yayoi Kusama, employs her method of 'self-obliteration', covering herself, objects and spaces in her art with patterns, as a form of "depersonalization", believed to neutralise the ego by blending "with the



Figure 5 Yayoi Kusama, *Self-Obliteration By Dots* (1968).

environment" and merging with the universe (Posner 162). The PhD films utilise chance, collaboration and transformation (turning the subjective into new stories) to balance out too much subjectivity, but also similarly to other female artists, employ my subjective embodied experience, for example in *Necropolis*.

Chadwick also notes that “women artists viewed themselves as having functioned independently of Breton’s inner circle and the shaping of Surrealist doctrine” (WA 11). Such a detour is evident in Varo, who’s work often “suggests references to her life”, as well as a “readable narrative” (Kaplan 111). Interestingly, in the introduction to *Nadja*, Polizzotti writes, that Breton’s work is “guided by [Breton’s] subjective viewpoint” (xxii), and *Nadja* transmits a reality, which is “ultimately Breton’s own”, based on real women and real life events (ibid.). Furthermore, Leonora Carrington, like Kusama and others, used her personal material and subjectivity as a process towards reflection and therapeutic transformation. Therefore, Carrington’s personal “recollections assist in promoting a kind of biographic mythology”, by choosing to conceal certain details, resulting in the creation of myths (Aberth 11). *Down Bellow* (1945/1973) records the journey towards healing and reconnecting with the self, transforming the experience of “her cruel treatment in an asylum” into a new mythology, beyond the actual events, and into an experience of “[being] taken to another world” (Hubert 114). As discussed further in chapter 3, *Mortido* and *Polednice* also employ traumatic events, and like *Down Bellow*, create a new mythology, illustrating a journey of the self in a transformative process.

Surrealism and Film/Cinema

Since this PhD explores Surrealism via film practice, it is essential to establish how the Surrealists engaged with and understood the film medium and cinema. Elder writes, that Surrealists valued art’s “capacity to produce powerful pneumatic effects” (260), seeing cinema as “the *exemplary* occult machine” (261). Film was seen as the “quintessentially modern media form” capable of connecting the realities of the dream and imagination with the material reality (Lowenstein 2).

There was even a belief, that cinema could free the mind from reality by “giving permission to liberate the imagination (or some other non-rational faculty)” (Elder 261). In *Le Surréalisme au cinéma* (1953), Kyrrou called cinema “surrealist by its very nature” (Noheden, *NM* 7; Richardson 5). While Breton finds the experience of randomly dipping in and out of cinemas, to result in a “charging” effect, noting films’ “lyrical substance” and coining this power with the term “*dépaysement*” (Matthews 1), in other words, the “visual, mental, and emotional dislocation”, as the “film passing before the surrealist movie-goer’s eyes is transmuted” (2). Elder notes, that “[t]he hallucinatory or oneiric character of the cinematic image” was seen as the answer to the Surrealist quest to “intensify experience” (262). Such a view suggests, that one can possibly experience “the marvellous” when one feels like it, “in a place where it is like joining the waking state with sleep” (Matthews 2). Buñuel also believed, that cinema could “complete and enlarge tangible reality” (ibid. 3). Since “[t]he poetic state of mind apprehends reality imaginatively [...] in a manner akin to dream”, and the view “that the dream is the stuff life is made of”, therefore “the poetic quality” enables film “to reveal the continuity between waking life and dream” like a collage by “the principle of parataxis” (Elder 262). However, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis documents the infamous fall out between Artaud and Dulac over their film *Seashell and the Clergy man* (1928). For Dulac, the film was “a condensation of associations”, and “a chain of metaphors”, but Artaud wrote it, “based on the Surrealist principles of displacement and dissociative juxtaposition”, rejecting “the system of traditional narrative” (Flitterman-Lewis 110-111). Fotiade notes, that Artaud disliked Germaine Dulac’s “close-up or the dissolve”, because, such *mise-en-scène* operates in that traditional manner of “interpretation” (“Pictures” 112). Deleuze interprets Artaud’s view of cinema, as “a matter of neuro-physiological vibrations”,

which “must produce a shock, a nerve-wave which gives rise to thought” (C2 165-166), explaining that Artaud believed in the potential of cinema to reveal the “difficulty of being” and the “powerlessness to think at the heart of thought” (C2 166; Fotiade, “Pictures” 111). Furthermore, “the new language of film had to illuminate equally disquieting, unfamiliar topics [...] heightening the impressions of ‘reality’ and, at the same time, disclosing images that the eye has not yet seen” (Fotiade, “Ready-made” 18). Importantly, Breton recognises, that the “super-disorientation (*sur-dépaysement*)” of the clash “between what is being shown and what the surrealist spectator chooses to see”, stems from his/her personal experience (Matthews 2-3). According to such an interpretation, film as a medium was believed to include “the inner needs of man”, and thus determining what we wish to see in the film (4). Significantly then, the audience, who are meant to find the film’s Surrealist elements, also determine the film’s relevance to Surrealism, which is then subjective. In the next chapter, I will expand on the subjective and sensory ‘embodied’ viewing experience in relation to Surrealism.

The Problematic Task of Defining a Film as Surrealist

Defining anything as Surrealist is inevitably a complex task. Louis Aragon compared Surrealism to “the horizon which continually flees before the walker”, beyond a definition (5). However, the refusal to pin down Surrealism does not reconcile with the demand for a clear definition, which arises with decisions regarding which piece of art or artist belongs to the movement. Furthermore, the sudden and rapid spread of Surrealism throughout the world meant “the word found favor much faster than the idea and all sorts of more or less questionable creations tend to pin the Surrealist label on themselves” (Breton, *MS* 257). Breton acknowledges “[it] would be de-sirable for us to establish a very precise line of

demarcation between what is Surrealist in its essence and what seeks to pass itself off as such”, in order to recognise an “authentic Surrealist object” by “some distinctive outer sign” (ibid.). However, such a task is only possible without having “arbi-trariness in the considerations” (Breton, *MS 258*). There is no tangible guide to validate a ‘correct’ engagement with an authentic Surreality in film, there are only differing suggestions, as various film scholars sought to tease out the qualities with which to assess films most suitably engaged with Surrealism. There are a number of incisive publications, for example: J.H Mathews’s *Surrealism and Film* (1971), Linda Williams’s *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (1981), Michael Richardson’s *Surrealism and Cinema* (2006), *The Unsilvered Screen: Surrealism on Film* (2007) edited by Graeme Harper and Rob Stone, Adam Lowenstein’s *Dreaming of Cinema: Spectatorship, Surrealism, and the Age of Digital Media* (2015), Bruce Elder’s *DADA, Surrealism, and the Cinematic Effect* (2013) and Kristoffer Noheden’s *Surrealism, Cinema, and The Search for a New Myth* (2017).

Linda Williams proposes, that the reason Surrealism is “that which cannot be analyzed” is possibly due to its enthusiasts and defenders trying to prevent the movement from having any “careful and close analysis” (xiii). Richardson also notes that “even among participants in surrealism there has never been a clear consensus about which films contain a surrealist charge, even if one could draw up a list of films that may be ‘privileged’ in one way or another from a surrealist point of view” (10). For Linda Williams, the only examples of “pure” film Surrealism and “the only unquestionably Surrealist films” are those that grew “directly out of the Surrealist movement” such as *Un Chien Andalou* and *L’Âge d’Or* (xiv). Williams’s study also highlights that the original Surrealist Group considered film

in a close relation to psychoanalysis (xii). Harper and Stone also note this psychoanalytic connection of the early films, equating “Surrealism and Freudianism”, as for example, *Un Chien Andalou* used the authors’ dreams for inspiration, and “revealed the cinema as the true metaphor of the dream state” (2). Furthermore, the desire “to provide a criterion of judgement by which a film or art work can be appraised” can often tend film theoreticians to define Surrealism based on “a theme, a particular type of imagery, certain concepts” (Richardson 3). Richardson demonstrates such a tendency is wrong, for even “the vast majority of surrealist painters” would not be immediately recognised as “surreal” (3), therefore “there are as many manifestations of [Surrealism] as there are surrealists” (171). Noheden also highlights the “stylistic heterogeneity” of Surrealist work (NM 11), since, the movement refuses “conventional historical and aesthetic definitions” then “the surrealist film needs to be seen as a constantly mutating beast” (NM 6-7). For example, anywhere “between short film, documentary, and feature film, and may employ collage techniques and animation as well as deceptively straightforward narratives” (ibid.). Furthermore, Harper and Stone suggest, that Surrealism is in the “cracks between the dislocated narratives, disassociated events and disturbing imagery of horror, science fiction, film-noir, animation, documentary and any other genre, but does not often reveal itself to the bait of logic” (4). Notably, Surrealists such as Jacques Brunius and Robert Desnos distrust “a technique orientated, aesthetic-dominated form” (the avant-garde), for being “potentially indifferent” to Surrealist ideals (Matthews 13-14). Yet, the avant-garde is also arguably a radical form, which akin to Surrealism, rebels against a dominant mode in disrupting Hollywood’s classical narrative cinema, focusing on producing an experience, rather than fulfilling a linear narrative. Richardson writes, that “today any director can make

use of what are considered to be 'surrealist' effects as part of his or her narrative armory", and assume their films are Surrealist just because they "contain elements derived from surrealism that have consciously been crafted into the film" (72). In his view, someone like David Lynch lacks the right Surrealist intention, and the critics who associate Lynch's films "with surrealism" misunderstand the movement's nature, wrongly focusing on "a 'surrealist' visual style" (Richardson 73). Richardson thus proposes to view the Surrealist art "as a residue, a mark of the practice of surrealism" (2), and to focus on "the distinctive qualities that make up the surrealist attitude" (3) of either the filmmaker or the themes of the films, such as the "attention to the transience of life, the otherness of encounter and the difficulties of communication" (75-76). In this light, Richardson identifies various Surrealist themes, for example, in the work of Nelly Kaplan, including the "commitment to freedom in which is freedom of the senses [...] the freedom of revolt, the freedom not to succumb to anything that is sordid in life [...] essentially the freedom to feel" (101-102).

The problem of judging a film as Surrealist will always exist, if merely for the reason, that the film's powerful effects on the viewer are always going to be subjective, based on their unique sensory and emotional reactions. Therefore, just as Richardson finds the Surrealist attitude in Kaplan's work, another viewer may find it in Lynch's work. Rob Stone suggests that "Surrealism on film does not thrive by becoming art but by cultivating the incongruous and performing the impossible" (30), which is akin to Buñuel's view that Surrealism should aim to "transform life itself" (Harper and Stone 3). Above all, the Surrealists suggest, that the crucial aim of films should be in them being felt, in "providing [the viewer's] imagination with something it can digest and transform surrealistically" (Matthews

14-15). Even though, there are no written rules on how to make Surrealist art, Buñuel and Dalí, for example, followed the chance principle of psychic automatism, to bypass conscious thought, claiming that in *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), they rejected “every idea of rational, aesthetic, or technical nature” (Matthews 89), in a quest to abolish any “meanings dictated by rational associations, and sequence” (90). However, this claim raises questions of how they obtained the props, such as the dead horses for the film in such an improvised manner. Richardson implies that the use of chance in filmmaking is not that essential, as for example, “Hitchcock's control”, and means of manipulating audience's reaction prevent such chance (71). Yet he argues that *Vertigo* (1958) shares the Surrealist interest in “memory and transformation, an obsession with death, dreams and the shifting status of reality”, in such a manner, that it arguably, “only makes sense in surrealist terms” (ibid.). Harper and Stone find Surrealism thriving in the elements of chance, such as, “the actor's spontaneous, 'in character' movements and gestures, or a curious, even disturbing confluence of *mise-en-scene* [...] a shot held just too long, or the detail of the camera angle, framing or movement that suggested an unsuspected thing” (4). Furthermore, they argue, that Surrealism lies “in the memories and dreams of films, in the fear and longing that they inspire and in the disorientation of the mind by the disproportionate order, importance and relevance of images and sounds” (4-5). The film practice of this PhD aligns the most with Harper and Stone's views, and unlike Buñuel and Dalí my employment of chance uses conscious associations in the filmmaking process. Importantly, Jan Švankmajer offers a helpful guide of playful and flexible ten rules on creating a film with a Surrealist mindset (see “Decalogue” 140-142), which suggests looking inwards,

connecting to childhood, focusing on obsessions, listening to inanimate objects, and employing other senses, such as touch.

However, even the best knowledge and efforts in engaging with the Surrealist practice, are incomplete without triggering the viewers' engagement. Ülo Pikkov considers Richardson's view, that a "film as a whole should provide the basis for defining surrealism", including "the experience of the audience", as "perhaps the only actual criterion of judgement" (34). Similarly, Jonathan L. Owen suggests that the "pure embodiments of Surrealism" are "best left to the individual viewer" (15). Richardson describes that the "sense of ambivalence that grips the viewer and won't let go", depends on the perspective such a film is viewed from, "if the viewers will it" (71). Therefore, from the Surrealist lens, a film is interconnected with the viewers, who can also examine "the Truth of their own lives; reality, that is, caught in the moments, the unexpected glimpses beyond the everyday" (Harper and Stone 8). For example, for Barbara Creed, Hitchcock's work is Surrealist, because its ability to shock "unleash[es] the power of the imagination", and "bring[s] about an altered state of consciousness" (122).

Furthermore, since, this project is mostly drawn to the darker side of the imagination, and to the marvellous in connection with the uncanny, trauma and fear, the films often align with the horror genre. The Surrealists noted the usefulness of the horror genre, in which a society has to "face realities it would prefer to ignore", for example, confronting "death and dissolution, and often uncovering the more persistent fears and desires that lie buried within our unconscious" (Richardson 63). Importantly, Richardson highlights that, Pierre Mabilie views fear and horror as an essential part of the marvelous (63).

Fear of death, you give life its value [...] Intoxicating dialectic of being and nonbeing which reopens the entire question, which creates anxiety, without which life would cost nothing [...] Disturbing limits beyond which life is compromised, you are surely the frontiers and the sources of the marvelous. (Mabille 89-90)

Similarly, Creed locates Surrealism in those films, which connect the viewer to the “dark side of the self”, triggered by themes such as “murder, transgressive sexual desire, voyeurism, sadism, cannibalism, necrophilia, the compulsion to repeat, death and the uncanny” (123). From this view, the focus on the “dark side of imagination, the nature of human fears of mutation, metamorphosis and bodily transformation”, such as found in David Cronenberg’s work, echoes “the early Surrealist belief in the supreme power of the imagination” (Creed 131). Therefore, Creed argues, that these darker themes, such as “abjection, the uncanny and death” play a significant role in Surrealism (133). Pikkov, also draws on Foster, connecting Surrealism with the ability to produce “the feeling of uncanny” (34). He mentions O’Sullivan’s PhD research on the artist and early animator Winsor McCay, and her interpreting the qualities, which trigger “anxiety, hostile atmosphere, [such as in] objects coming together in irrational conjunctions, constantly threatening mechanical devices” as ‘Surrealist’ (Pikkov 31).

The film publications on Surrealism also raise attention to the scarcity of female filmmakers in the movement. The women that are mentioned include: Nelly Kaplan, Germain Dulac and Maya Deren. However, Dulac’s film *Seashell and the Clergyman/ La Coquille et le clergyman* (1928), was received negatively by the Surrealist Group, due to Artaud’s falling out with Dulac, for not delivering his outlook and the Surrealist message of his script, failing to induce various “states of mind”, and using “familiar trends in cinematic expression” (Matthews 78-79). Though, the Surrealists rejected Dulac’s film, it arguably explores the relevant

themes of their interests, such as irrationality, death, magic, juxtapositions and the merging of dream and reality. Furthermore, the trance-like quality of *Seashell's* rhythm; the use of pace, slow motion and associative montage also arguably immerse the viewer into a particular state of being, conjuring feelings which cannot be explained by logic, and which shock and activate imagination. Richardson ignores *Seashell*, for it “entirely belongs to the avant-garde, not surrealism” (11), and argues that “the only female film-maker linked with surrealism” is Nelly Kaplan (93), who wore “her surrealism on her sleeve”, as “there are constant references to surrealist myths and ideas throughout her work” (94). Noheden also highlights Kaplan’s work as Surrealist, in its contribution “to the surrealist search for a new myth” (NM 117). Another female filmmaker mentioned in relation to Surrealism is the avant-garde artist Maya Deren, who was involved with the Surrealists in New York, for example, “*Witch’s Cradle*, was made in collaboration with Marcel Duchamp, but her films nevertheless cannot really be considered part of surrealism” (Richardson 11). Indeed, Maya Deren herself stressed, that her films should not be “announced or publicized as Surrealist”, for it would confuse “the audience by inspiring a false interpretation of the films according to systems to which they bear no relation” (Keller 84)³. Deren’s refusal to have her work associated with the movement might have stemmed from her reaction to the Surrealist focus on the chance method, as she noted, “the preoccupation with conscious control of form which is involved in the making of these films is obviously at variance with the Surrealist aesthetic of spontaneity” (ibid.). However, as Richardson notes in reference to Hitchcock, chance is not the most essential aspect in judging a film’s relevance to Surrealism. Furthermore, this project finds Deren’s films and her theoretical

³ Deren’s note to renters of her films, MDC (Maya Deren Collection).

writing on female time, the multiplicity of the self and the exploration of the process of becoming, of connecting distant spaces, her use of associative montage, eschewing a linear narrative, allowing her work to be open to interpretation, along with her practice of revisiting films over time and even leaving them unfinished, to echo crucial Surrealist notions. Though Michael Richardson lists reasons for those filmmakers who are and who aren't Surrealists, his own suggestion also recognises, that the film's relevance depends on the viewer, and that the author does not in fact have to be a Surrealist, as "surrealism" can emerge "despite any conscious knowledge [filmmakers] may or may not have of surrealism" (71 and 75). Therefore, Deren, Dulac and many others are considered by the subjective viewing experience of this project to be relevant to the concepts of the movement. Additionally, Pikkov's interviews, with filmmakers he finds 'Surrealist' (Švankmajer, and Brothers Quay), illustrates the aim "to shed light on the metaphysical world", focusing on "personal internal universe and visualisations of the subconscious", and addressing collectivity, "not necessarily manifest[ed] as artistic collaboration, but rather as companionship of shared sensibility" (36).

The research conducted on Surrealism, from the different angles demonstrated in this chapter, illustrates, that the quality of 'Surrealist' practice/ art stems from its aims to trigger the spectator into an experience of the marvellous and the particularly subjective and embodied practice of the female artists helps to situate my practice, from a perspective of a female engaging with the movement. Significantly, the film theoreticians agree, that the viewer decides what is Surrealist, and thus point the focus on the subjectively experiencing audience.

Chapter 2: Surrealist Tactility, Haptic Visuality and the Embodied Imagination

The findings of the previous chapter, together with my viewing exploration of the various films branded as Surrealist, highlight the involvement of the sensory quality. For example, even though the films (associated with Surrealism) are in many ways unique, they trigger a bodily response in my viewing, and involve my imagination to contemplate the meanings, 'feeling' them with personal sensory memories. Furthermore, my creative methods have always had a strong tendency to connect as close as possible to the filmed body and then again in editing, to the image, as if expending my own embodiment into the work. Importantly, this observation was not recognised or intended in the making of the films of this PhD. Furthermore, for these reasons, the research draws on a non-standard methodology, rooted in existential Phenomenology. Laura Marks proposes the extra appeal to embodied knowledge and sensory impressions, is often present in the films of those misplaced, and attempting to retrieve a memory or dealing with a loss (of a knowledge, a person or a place). Marks's study situates my tendencies, but also evokes the Surrealist practice of women, involving their body, and who longed for their places of origin. Sobchack's and Barker's studies contemplate both the power of embodied viewing and the involvement of senses in the perception and expression of films. Furthermore, the Surrealist filmmaker Jan Švankmajer has both the Surrealist aims, exploring and include the imaginary in uniting all realities, but also focuses on multisensory vision, and finding 'touch' to play a significant role on our imagination. Significantly for this research, Kristoffer Noheden connects Švankmajer's aims, concepts of 'embodiment', 'mimesis', 'imagination of matter' and Breton's 'poetic analogy' to affirm the essential role of the sensory in Surrealism.

When the Visual Knowledge is not Enough

As mentioned, Laura Marks proposes, that intercultural filmmakers (who also often practice in the experimental video form), employ certain images in their practice, in an attempt to express “the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge, or living as a minority” (SF 1). The often attempt to “evoke memories”, which are lost and believed to be recovered by the “nonvisual [...] embodied knowledge, and experiences of [the] senses, such as touch, smell and taste” (Marks, SF 2). This is not only relevant to my in-between Czech and English position, but a number of Surrealist artists were also exiles, longing for their countries of origins. As discussed in the previous chapter, the work of the female artist, often employs the body and embodiment (Mendieta, Woodman), with others transforming their loss and history into myths (Varo and Carrington). Furthermore, this project believes the film form has a potential to communicate embodied knowledge and experience of the senses. For Vivian Sobchack, “cinema uses our dominant senses of vision and hearing to speak comprehensibly to our other senses” (67).

although I cannot taste the *exact* flavours of the pork noodles [...] I see in loving close-up [...] I still do have a partially fulfilled sensory experience of these things that make them both intelligible to and meaningful to me. (Sobchack 76)

The PhD films highlight the material quality of the objects, characters, but also the ‘texture’ of the film itself, produced by certain filters, lenses and superimpositions. The viewers are presented with the senses implied in touching of a burnt skin, smelling the dusty fabric, the warmth of the gooey blood, the tasting of the rotting fish covered in custard, or just wanting to remove the hair on the record player’s needle. These ‘fetish objects’ can, as Marks documents “extend bodily experience into memory”, a ‘sense memory’, which, “cinema can activate” and make “volatile so that they intervene in the present” (SF 201).

Haptic Images and Memory

Marks's 'haptic visuality' stands for "touching a film with one's eyes" (SF xi). From the view of psychology, "haptic *perception*" incorporates "tactile, kinesthetic, and proprioceptive functions", so we can feel touch, for example, "both on the surface of and inside our bodies" (Marks, SF 162). Marks borrows the physiological term "haptic" to *perception* and *visuality*, describing "the viewer's inclination to perceive" the 'haptic' *images* (SF 162). The films, she finds to be haptic "invite a look that moves on the surface plane of the screen for some time before the viewer realizes what she or he is beholding", with a primary focus on "the material presence of the image" (Marks, SF 162-163). Mark's is aware that her 'haptic' image also rhymes with Deleuze's time-image cinema, as she describes it as the image, which "forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative" (SF 163). For Deleuze, images of experimental work, such as Cassavetes's, challenge "the story, plot, or action, but also space" representation, which forces the viewer's body to think, "to get to attitudes as to categories which put time into the body, as well as thought into life" (C2 192). For Marks, the haptic image of intercultural films invites retrieving memories "by bringing them into the very present, even into the body of the viewer" (SF 53). She proposes, that a viewer, who is interested in "the stories hinted at" in films, for example, found in the "grainy images archival footage, and maddeningly silent protagonists", is "likely to search the optical image and attempt to bring it to life" (Marks, SF 53-54). Marks points out that haptic visuality can be used in "poetically approach[ing] an ineffable object", for example, Ines Cardoso's *Diastole* (1994) employs haptic images (unclear and blurred), the use of filters and other devices, such as a bubble wrap and materials for blurring and disguise (SF 191-192). In this light, *Mortido*, similarly to *Diastole*, illustrates touch as a sense of closeness

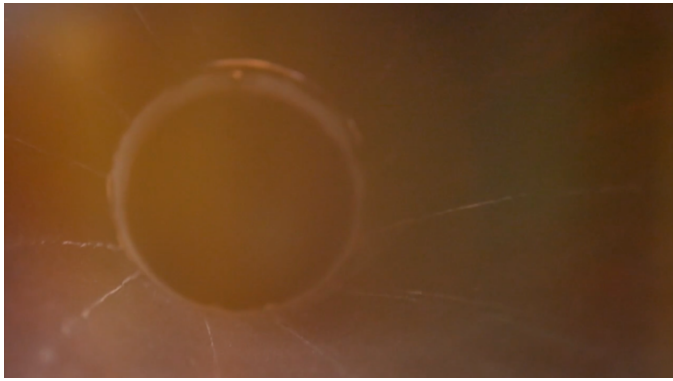


Figure 6 Mortido, dissolving into a gramophone horn.

between the film and the viewer, connecting them through the grainy and blurry images. For example, in one scene, the camera moves so closely to the texture of the

gramophone horn, that the image gradually becomes only a brown tinted blurry light. Drawing on Deleuze's 'recollection image' (C2 55), Marks notes, that "when we do not recognize or cannot remember", we fill in the blanks with our imagination (Marks, *SF* 50). From this perspective, the 'haptic' image can thus trigger our subjective imagination and our viewing sensory body, into producing the meaning. The PhD practice in general employs Marks's haptic images, in the blurred textures, extreme close-ups, archival like footage/ old (crackling) sound recordings and the absence of dialogue- the silent characters, all aiming for the viewers' imagination to complete them. Ambitiously, Surrealists are encouraged to try and evoke a powerful sensory moment, the sense of the marvellous, which Breton describes in the surprising experience triggered by a rainbow, and this memory reveals the sense of the marvellous, he calls it the 'living focal point' (*MS* 220-222). Furthermore, the disorientating quality of the haptic image also echoes the Surrealist object, in being out of its habitual context and encouraging a new experiencing. The haptic image and the Surrealist object both present a mystery luring us in, to retrieve it within ourselves. Deleuze notes, the involvement of our body in film viewing, "[n]ot that the body thinks, but, obstinate and stubborn, it forces us to think, and forces us to think what is concealed from thought, life" (C2 189), when the "perception is freed from the usual round of action, enabling us to think anew" (Marks, *SF* 73). According to Harper and Stone, the concept of

triggering memories and embodiment in Surrealist film can draw on the analogy of Plato's cave and Proust's madeleine: "the chance that shadows cast by light onto a wall [Plato's cave]" triggering "memories of our primal pasts [Proust's madeleine]" and this 'Truth' (those Proust's moments relating to memory) represent "the undercurrent of life" (1).

Similarities between Intercultural Cinema and Surrealism

Secondly, according to Marks, the haptic is often employed to fill in a problematic and uncertain history by those in the "process of mourning, [in] a search for loved ones [people, spaces] who have vanished and cannot be recalled with any of the means at the artist's disposal" (SF 5). There appear to be shared strategies and



Figure 7 Ana Mendieta, *Untitled from the Silueta series* (1976).

intentions between the artists of intercultural work and the Surrealists, who were, in fact often forced to flee their countries in order to escape the war in Europe, finding exile in New York or Mexico (Kaplan 81). Thus, the yearning and nostalgia for their lost home often seeps into their work. For example, the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), employed the "interplay

between the presence of [her] body and its absence, signified by the trace left on the landscape" to illustrate the "feeling of separation, loss, and longing" (Posner 164). Fittingly, *Necropolis: A Walk through the Graveyard* in a way similar to Mendieta, employs a strategy of metamorphosing into the space, marking it with my body and memories (the nostalgia of a distant place), which the space (the

graveyard) triggers. Therefore, like Mendieta's photographs, the film highlights similar Surrealist intentions described by Posner as the act to experiencing both "space and time" (168-169), but they also document the intentions of Marks's haptic images/visuality.

Furthermore, Marks notes, loss and excavation present in the work of those displaced, also leads to the creation of new myths (*SF* 195). In other words, "when language cannot record memories, we often look to images", and when the images fail, we turn to "the secrets of objects", which can lead to "the memory of the senses" (Marks, *SF* 195). Even though, the intercultural artist "cannot recreate the sensory experience of their individual or cultural past", there is, a possibility of creating "new kinds of sense knowledges" (a reorganisation of the senses), which can occur, for example, when "people move between cultures" (*ibid.*), or, might result from the fusion and sharing ability between the unique individualities amongst audiences. The transformative process of the Surrealist artists, such as Carrington and Varo, is illustrated, for example, in the changing of their past memories, blending them with other knowledge and producing new myths. Kaplan notes Varo's work is packed with memories, "lurking behind the walls, peering out from the tabletop, bursting forth from the upholstery are ghosts of herself" (148). Varo's past is hidden in images fusing mythologies of different cultures and philosophies, but as Kaplan notices, are still sensed. Furthermore, the images invite my own familiar recollection, as well as a new (imagined) experience. Similarly, the PhD films are shot in the UK, but unintentionally carry sensory memories of someone from Prague and those of my family members', which are represented in the details of the props (such as the Russian super 8camera, that most Czechs of my generation associate with certain smell and

weight, the old magazines, the antique family photographs and other small memorabilia). The PhD film practice, like Varo's work, acted to produce new supernatural myths, but also involved some reordering and exorcising of the past. Significantly, Stone notes that the Surrealist attitude in film can be found in the merging of the "ever-shifting patterns of ordinary events and descriptive details" with "supernatural and dreamlike elements", for example, as employed by the Spanish director Julio Medem (35). Medem re-ordered his life events and moved from "real actions and personal experiences into the metaphysical plane of his films", which enabled him "to move between real and fictional worlds", but the fantastical material "exists because of the emotion invested in them" (Stone 35). Interestingly, Marks explains "optical visibility" tries to recover what is unseen, whereas, "haptic visibility" invites other senses and can mourn "the absent object or the absent body", and therefore, haptic cinema offers speaking "nearby" to the object "with only a desire to caress it, not to lay it bare" (Marks, *SF* 191). Additionally, this haptic quality of cinema can provide an answer to the Surrealist act of seeking the repressed, while at the same time keeping its enigma veiled. As Breton notes his intention in "being interested only in books left ajar" rather than in "looking for keys" (*N* 18). The Surrealists drew attention to lost knowledge, which they aimed to resuscitate, the "lost primordial faculty where perception and representation are one (i.e. where the imagination actively transforms sense impressions)" (Noheden, "Imagination" 3). In Foster's view, the Surrealist practice often incorporates the theme of repetition, echoing the return of the repressed, and pointing back to a loss or a traumatic event. Intercultural cinema also draws on trauma and loss. The notion of the individual grief or trauma can also be translated into a collective notion that encapsulates ideas of the role of the viewer and audience.

our experiences are mediated and qualified not only through the various transformative technologies of perception and expression but also by historical and cultural systems that constrain both the inner limits of our perception and the outer limits of our world. (Sobchack 4)

Marks notes, “[e]mbodiment involves a level of trauma”, and “our bodies encode history, which in turn informs how we perceive the world” (SF 152) and perception is thus “a walk through the minefield of embodied memory” (SF 152). The embodied perception of the viewer might not match the experience intended in the film, but the viewer might get “a sense of what is missing” and discover a new “sense information” (SF 153). Furthermore, Marks’s proposal, that our perception is shaped by our memories, which also involve “traces of collective life”, thus “the search for memory images [often] turns out to be a process of collective mourning: of ritual” (Marks, SF 73-74). In this light, *Mortido* can be a ritual of collective mourning, only if its haptic images trigger viewers’ imagination and memories. Significantly, all of the PhD films draw on a knowledge, which mainly belongs to “the memory of the body” (Marks, SF 76). The memory of the body experienced in a dream and in moments of altered mental states.

The Role of Imagination in the Viewing Embodiment

The act of both, retrieving a multisensory memory and thinking with our body, relies on the imagination and its associations. Carrington’s *Down Below* (1944), proposes, that “the task of the right eye is to peer into the telescope, while the left eye peers into the microscope”, which unifies one’s “own experiences as well as the past and future history of the Universe” (175). Carrington connects the personal and collective through her body, for example in her episodes of fasting and purging to cleanse the world (Aberth 77), seeing her stomach as “the seat of that society” and “the mirror of the earth, the reflection of which is just as real as the person reflected” (Carrington 164). On another level, the connection between

a film and a viewer can serve as an example of the practice of synthesis via senses, and mimesis. In Jennifer Barker's view, a film and a viewer indeed share a "tactile resonance and reciprocity", evidenced in our experiencing of films "viscerally" ("Tactile" viii). She argues, "before we can think about the movies, we're already feeling them", and this "personal, and embodied experience [...] has its own truths to tell" (Barker, "Tactile" 1). Therefore, such experiencing of films, akin to Deleuze and Marks, means our body or senses can contemplate more than is available to our rational way of thinking/ focusing on the narrative. Deleuze defines the sign of the affection-image, found in "the power-quality expressed by a face" but also "presented in any-space-whatever", which is more "suitable for extracting" and spreading "the affect" (C1 110). Therefore, he recognized the potential of experimental cinema to "rediscover the body" (Marks SF 73), "the everyday body and the ceremonial body, are discovered or rediscovered in experimental cinema" (C2 191). Marks finds Deleuze's 'affection-images' – 'any-space-whatever', in the intercultural experimental films, which she writes, invite her "bodily response" such as "a shudder" or "grief" and which are "located among irrational cuts, black screens, divergent image and sound" (SF 73-74). Barker also explains this bodily contemplation: "I understand loss and memory more profoundly by feeling and being immersed in them than merely by thinking about the loss and memory as concepts" ("Tactile" 3). The film works for this project aim to immerse the viewer to feel, rather than think, or to think beyond logic listening to their body and drawing on their sensory knowledge. Arguably, *Mortido* would have been a good example of this concept had the film refrained from the additional voice-over (traditionally narrating grief), as the film alone would have possibly conjured sensory feelings in the viewer, by 'affection-images' both of the extreme close-ups of the face and of the 'any-space-

whatever' as exemplified by Marks. Significantly, Barker writes "the caress of the films' images and their piercing penetration are real and tangible, as are the shivering skin, the cringing muscles, and the fluttering stomach that we might feel while watching them" ("Tactile" 1). Drawing on existential phenomenology, Sobchack also views the vision as "'fleshed out' [...] by our other modes of sensory access to the world", potentially provoking "in us the 'carnal thoughts' that ground and inform more conscious analysis" (60). I see a connection between these views (Marks, Barker, Sobchack, Deleuze) with the Surrealist aim to pursue the "ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses" (Breton, *WS* 49). This view of multisensory vision and embodied contemplation/ viewing is employed in the PhD films, which by intending to unify different realms (imagined/ real), times and spaces, focuses on the sensory experience and always aimed to immerse the viewer in *feeling* the film's meaning, before acknowledging any of the studies exploring the sensory language of film. Significantly, Barker argues that film itself is capable of transmuting an emotion, for example, Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975) demonstrates, that "love, desire, nostalgia, and joy are perceived and expressed in fundamentally tactile ways, not only by the characters but also, even more profoundly, by film and viewer" (*TE* 1). These embodied experiences are felt in "the entire body", registering "as movement, comportment, tension, internal rhythms, and a full-bodied engagement with the materiality of the world" (Barker, *TE* 2). Therefore, Barker views touch, not just as in Marks's haptic experience of the surface, but also in the viewer's total immersion in the film, as "a 'style of being' shared by both film and viewer" and as the mode of "perception and expression" (*TE* 2-3). From this perspective, the acts of "caressing, striking, startling, pummelling, grasping, embracing, pushing, pulling, palpation, immersion, and inspiration" are "tactile"

(Barker, *TE* 3). Therefore, the viewer uniquely connects to the film by enacting (mimicking) the film through its “tactile structures”, in other words:

haptically, at the tender surface of the body; kinaesthetically and muscularly, in the middle dimension of muscles, tendons, and bones[...] and viscerally, in the murky recesses of the body, where heart, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing synapses receive, respond to, and reenact the rhythms of cinema. (ibid.)

Furthermore, Barker suggests, the boundaries between a film and its viewers can be blurred. For example, one viewer of *The Mirror* describes “another form of communication [language]: by means of feelings, and images” which “remove[s] obstacles from between people who otherwise stand on opposite sides of a mirror, on opposite sides of a door [...] and the world which used to be partitioned off comes into us, becomes something real” (Barker, *TE* 11). This viewer’s experience, these dissolved boundaries echoes with the Surrealist notion of the marvellous, of connecting “contradictions” (Breton, *MS* 123). Furthermore, Marks’s observation of the cross-identification of different audiences viewing intercultural films in festivals, illustrates “that identities are never static but always relational, capable of creating links among different groups that transform those groups” (*SF* 19). The act of viewing a film also leaves traces, “of differently seeing audiences” which attaches “to the skin of these works” (Marks, *SF* 20). The PhD films have been screened at a variety of festivals and indeed conjured new meanings at each screening. In the different contexts and countries that they have screened, the interpretations of the audience have related to the different emotions arising from them. For example, these have included screenings at an LGBT event, for an audience interested in women’s cinema, and for the audience of purely experimental film work, as well as a screening of Eastern European experimental work and documentaries. These screenings highlighted different perspectives, but importantly brought to light, that the venue and audience were

crucial in the received meaning of the films. The audience interactions and reactions are also undoubtedly influenced by the intimate setting of the venues, which highlights the role of film consumption.

Surrealist Imagination of Touch

The active Surrealist member and filmmaker, Jan Švankmajer argues, that “touch is an older sense than sight and its experience is more fundamental” than our vision which has become “rather tired”, and the experience of the body is thus “more authentic” and “uninhabited by aestheticization” (“Decalogue” 141). Švankmajer is influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, believing our “sight is capable, to a greater or smaller extent depending on individuals, to transfer tactile sensations in a mediated way” (Noheden, *NM* 189). This fact is crucial in connecting the sensory to Surrealism. Švankmajer researched the sense of touch, to test its triggering of one’s imagination on members of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group in the 1970s (Noheden, *NM* 2). His *Touching and Imagining: An Introduction to Tactile Art* (2014) documents one of these tactile experiments, the ‘Restorer’ (1974), testing the perception of touch on the participants’ engagement with “an imaginative tactile” object (Švankmajer, *TI* 13). Without viewing the object, they were asked to “describe their tactile impressions”, such as the object’s colour, as well as any triggered “associations and analogies” (ibid.). Švankmajer, believes, that the “perception of a tactile object is like an expedition into an unknown country of dreams”, where things familiar transform into the unreal and where we reach for “association and tactile analogy” (*TI* 12-13). He concludes, that the results of his experiment, indeed, “show that touch supplied adequate information to arouse associative memories” and enabled “imagination” (Švankmajer *TI* 17). These imagined qualities,

however, “do not correspond with reality”, and often “have to be attributed to memory associations” (Švankmajer, *TI* 20). This view echoes with Marks’s sensory memory, and further affirms my aim to trigger viewers’ imagination- which often retrieves a memory; the experience I find when watching films, which are possibly Surrealist (either by being labelled as such by a film theoretician, or by my subjective opinion). Švankmajer also proposes, that the tactile should be “vague” enough, or only depicted by a fragment, “to excite with their strangeness”, in order to tap into the unconscious to trigger imagination (*TI* 21). The tactile object is able to express feelings beyond “words, colours or shapes” (*TI* 25).

The Therapeutic Transformation in the Surrealist Practice

According to Breton, love is “the only idea capable of reconciling any man, momentarily or not, with the idea of life” (*MS* 180). One of the facets of *Mortido*, is an exploration of love as a sensory feeling, triggered by the fear of losing the source of love and mourning its loss, therefore, the role of death is essential in this process. Foster notes, Breton’s death is a “dissociative principle”, opposing “surrealist love” and “distanced from it” (14) because love is “liberatory” (15-16). However, Foster proposes the lens through the uncanny, to connect love and death “in a way that brooks no affirmative reconciliation” (17). Foster’s view, fits with *Mortido*’s dealing with “the loss of the love object” in the act of preparation “for a shock [...] in traumatic neurosis” (Foster 32). Since, the film was made during the period of awaiting the certain death of a loved one, and the process of re-editing took place after the loss had occurred, the editing stage also became a form of re-enacting ‘the repressed’ trauma through the repetition of re-watching, cutting and manipulating the images, which was consequently therapeutic. Additionally, Marks also highlights the “process of creation that begins at the time

of grieving” in “deconstructing dominant histories to creating new conditions for new stories” (*SF* 5), which is similar to the Surrealists' searching for a New Myth. The concept of the New Myth also aims to retrieve some “arcane knowledge”, and draws on “making playful juxtapositions intended to create new, blistering connections” (Noheden, *NM* 2). The films of this PhD, like collages blend real events in with new elements drawing on the imagination or employing chance. Therefore, such practice not only served to detach (find an answer/ being therapeutic), but also being creative and produce something entirely nonsensical and original. Such transformation of trauma into creative practice and therapy, also hints back to Breton’s interest in Freud’s ‘sublimation’ and Švankmajer’s desire to aid the broken society by re-establishing a new mythology. Richardson, notes Švankmajer’s interest in alchemy, lies in the analogy of the alchemical process “draw[ing] out the properties of things”, for example, of the “society in decay and needing renewal” (132-133). Švankmajer explains:

[w]hen any civilisation feels its end is growing near, it returns to its beginnings and looks to see whether the myths on which it is founded can be interpreted in new ways, which would give them a new energy and ward off the impending catastrophe. (Hames, “Interview” 122)

Švankmajer’s films refer to the renewal of the decayed, from a political perspective, especially those made after the collapse of the totalitarian regime, but already amidst of the new dangers of democracy ruled by capitalism. My work also focuses on the process of drawing out impurities as a process of transformation, but on a personal, rather than political level, akin to Carrington or Varo, employing the body and embodiment in the process. I share Marks’s view of the mimetic way of being, “whereby the subject comes into being not through abstraction from the world but compassionate involvement in it” (Marks, *SF* 141). Furthermore, *Mortido* and *Polednice* are acts of self-preservation, pointing back to the roots of childhood, to re-interpret family myths in the search for a

completely new aiding perspective, which echoes the Surrealist quest for liberation and the new myth.

Surrealist Tactility in Film

Significantly for my research, Kristoffer Noheden insightfully re-frames Marks's tactile visuality into 'surrealist tactility', to explore the 'embodied imagination', which invites the viewers' own associations ("Imagination" 2). Noheden finds the role of the imagination in the embodied film viewing, aligns with Gaston Bachelard's view, that imagination has 'multisensory properties' employing analogy, akin to Surrealism, echoing Breton's 'surrealist poetics of analogy' ("Imagination" 1-12). Noheden thus affirms, that the tactile quality of images plays a crucial role in a Surrealist film, for the images of Švankmajer's work invite touch, in a way that enables the viewer to experience both reality (the traditional, non-surrealist view of the word) but also the triggered imagination of something new. Noheden interprets Bachelard's view of imagination as "manifesting itself in poetic images of matter that work through the principle of analogy", exemplified by Švankmajer's tactile means, evoking the 'imagination of touch' ("Imagination" 10). Furthermore, since Western civilisation eschews analogical thinking, which is considered to belong to the unconscious and to be anti-utilitarian, such search for imaginative meaning rhymes well with the Surrealist aim "to render the world meaningful through poetic interpretation" (Noheden, "Imagination" 11). Noheden notes that this framing of "imagination and interpretation" rhymes with Breton's Surrealist method of "poetic analogy", in that "the surrealist poetic image [...] establishes new and unexpected relations between diverse phenomena" leading "to a revelation of the world in its heterogeneous unity" (Noheden, "Imagination" 4; see Breton, *MS* 20). Švankmajer's "absurd cakes baked with coal and eggs"

in *Down to the Cellar* (1983) are an example of such seeing “through the imagination of matter”, also demonstrating, that analogies do not only work via “the fantastic depictions [...] but also through [...] the matter of the everyday as it is estranged and enchanted when put in dialectical relation with the imagination” (Noheden, “Imagination” 12). Surrealist tactility thus invites the sensations of touch, even into objects and acts, which we have never experienced before, but can also possibly “trigger further analogical associations of the kind that structure the dream logic of the film” (Noheden, “Imagination” 6). Noheden also highlights, that Švankmajer’s films accomplish to “invite the viewer’s touch” by enhancing texture and materiality, through the use of “extreme close-ups of body parts, objects, and surfaces” (“Imagination” 5). Furthermore, from myself being Czech and watching Švankmajer’s work from an early age, suggests such focus on texture has also undoubtedly, even if unintentionally, influenced these PhD films, which favour extreme close-ups and observing of body parts, from up close. Furthermore, Švankmajer’s tactile methods often depict the sensory in a manner that “may cause uncomfortable sensations” in the viewer, making “disgust and discomfort stand out as key features in creating tactile impressions, whether it is in the form of direct bodily identification with unpleasant actions or sensory impressions of matter, dead or living, that one is reluctant to touch” (Noheden, “Imagination” 5). I have a strong personal preference/ interest in depicting the unpleasant, which possibly drew my interest to Surrealism, often aiming to shock. Importantly, Noheden recognizes the difference between the tactility of films in Marks’s study and the tactility adequate for Surrealism, as the intercultural films deal with reality/ real events.

However, I believe, that the films of this PhD engage with both Surrealism and also Marks's views. This chapter highlights, that the use of tactile images in the PhD films stems from the desire to retrieve memories or recover from loss and trigger analogical thinking. The films present the tactile images and objects explained by Marks as searching for a memory, a sense memory. Furthermore the films transform the forgotten and retrieved memories into a new sense knowledge. Therefore, in my view, there appears to be a parallel between intercultural films and Surrealism, with both being drawn to the sensory in their creativity, arguably due to their shared desire to both foreground the 'dominant' perception, and search for lost memories. Furthermore, Surrealism seeks a perspective which goes beyond binary thinking, and vision and image are often prioritised over the other senses. Additionally, in the view of Foster, the Surrealist practice aims to cultivate of the uncanny, through the re-telling and reliving of trauma (loss) by repetition. This research on tactility has established that the sensory connection in the relationship between the viewer, the film and the viewing experience invites the experience of senses of touch, which can act to trigger memories and possibly cultivate a new sensory knowledge. Furthermore, similarly to other women artists, I employ the Surrealist practice (coincidentally) as a form of a therapy.

Chapter 3: Film Practice

Informed by my research on Surrealism, the practice based films utilise dreams and altered states of mind (for finding inspiration); defamiliarize objects out of their habitual context; experiment with deconstructing and disorientating space and time through editing and sound; along with further juxtaposing visuals and audio into a montage to produce new meanings in the editing stage (creating the poetic image). The characters of the PhD films are also often unified with the world and the spaces through the use of superimpositions, of layers bridging different spaces and times (see the method of superimposition in the appendix). Furthermore, the film theoreticians considered in this research, also influence the practice of embracing spontaneity and chance (such as the improvised moments of the actors); the consideration of the viewers' imagination; the aim for the audience to *feel* and experience elements of the marvellous; and as Lowenstein proposes, welcoming the viewer to do "things with films that were not anticipated or intended" (3). This film practice is also firmly located within the sphere of independent film production, akin to the videos of Marks's intercultural study, as oppose to the expensive process that mainstream filmmaking entails. Also similarly to Maya Deren's practice, these films make use of zero budgets, and of any obstacles that arose during filming, often involving just a crew of one person, operating the camera, preparing the set and art design, lights and sound. Furthermore, the project embraces the mentality, that the filmmaking process does not have to go according to a set plan, eschewing a linear narrative and employing improvisation. The research of the previous chapters, on the key tenets of Surrealism, the Surrealist qualities in film, and the role of embodiment and haptic visuality/ surrealist tactility, is further undertaken with these seven PhD film experiments. This chapter demonstrates and explores these attempts, while

also keeping in mind the role of the audience as part of creating the films' meaning, by focusing on the sensory experience of their viewing. The following analysis looks at the individual experiments in chronological order, highlighting their specific focus on various Surrealist notions.

Ghosts (2011)

The film is an exercise in following the Surrealist principle of chance in an attempt to produce a poetic image, using juxtapositions to shock and evoke the sensory experience of disgust, discomfort, and pleasure. The exercise employed improvisation, for example, the film eschewed a script, and it was a collaborative game created on the spot, with each individual actor filmed alone and limited to 20 minutes of filming time. The props and ideas for the film were formed around what was available in the space, and the only theme in mind was for it to be



Figure 9 Ghosts, stretching the skin.



Figure 8 Ghosts, rubbing pasta against the skin.

sensory. The sense of touch was a key connecting thread, with the intention to stimulate the viewer's imagination, akin to the work of Jan Švankmajer ('surrealist tactility'). For example, by depicting tactile impressions such as the character stretching his skin to a painful or satisfying degree (depending on the viewer), or of the perspective of

the character who rubs his naked body with cooked pasta and squeezes soft



Figure 10 *Ghosts*, feeling a fabric.

berries between his toes. *Ghosts* also addresses sensations such as inhaling and exhaling smoke, the touch of soft fabric, being kissed and caressed, as well as the peeling of old wallpaper.

Since *Ghosts* was a collaborative exercise, it was shaped by the phobias and fetishes distinctive to the actors in their real life. For example, the man rubbing his naked body with the slimy pasta has a phobia of dirt and textures, while the character stretching his skin has abnormally flexible skin and a pleasurable reaction to this action. The editing of *Ghosts* also employed chance, through the connection of random shots on the time-line. This evoked the manner of Tzara's shaking words in a bag in order to create a poem through random arrangement. In *Ghosts* this unintentionally created new connections between the images. The illogical and juxtaposed images of the five different characters, filmed separately, as if merging five different films (akin to Breton's dipping in and out of cinemas), were placed out of their individual contexts into one film, into a unity, similar to a dream. Furthermore, the viewer is able to make up a narrative out of these



Figure 11 *Ghosts*, footage from Kostnice Sedlec.

images, based on the actions on screen, which centre on acts of touching or feeling, employing extreme close-ups to highlight the materiality and texture. Additionally,

the film was also mixed with a sinister footage previously captured of the Kostnice Sedlec in Kutná Hora. The interest in filming the real human skulls and bones

decorating the Ossuary was inspired by Švankmajer's short film, *Kostnice/Ossuary* (1970). The extreme close-ups of the actors's touching and 'feeling' faces were then juxtaposed with the human remains, and highlight the contrasting times of 2011 and 15th century via the shared materiality of the human body. Even though, Švankmajer's film is sinister in its visuals, its sound makes the short comical, playing with irony (see the version of the film with the recording of the guide, an older lady showing children on their school trip around the Ossuary, spending most of her time telling them off, in such a manner one imagines they are in a toy museum, rather than in a place decorated with such horrific material). *Ghosts* predominantly employs horror in a form of disgust, rather than a comical spark, it aims to invite the viewer's bodily contemplation. The contrasting blend of living feeling body with the deceased remains, also unintentionally creates a theme of feared mortality. The film also juxtaposes a woman operating a camera



Figure 12 *Ghosts*, recording a film.



Figure 13 *Ghosts*, destroying a film reel.

with her touching and destroying a film reel, which offers parallels to the theme through the live action of filming and the remains of the dead film. Furthermore, as previously described, the footage was 'shaken in a bag' before being thrown on the timeline, and only then did the meanings appear. The editing was a process of revisiting the film over

time, with the original film starting in 2011, and only transforming into the latest version with the superimposed layers added in 2016. The shot of a bare, pulsating muscle juxtaposes against the stillness of the Ossuary's skull. The skin on the neck is caught in the fingers of the man at the same time as a superimposed image shows a membrane moving coincidentally in sync. The blurry image of a woman's silhouette influenced the title *Ghosts*, like the haunting past, the trauma, memory, once living, in the process of decaying and dying. The Ossuary is a haunting mark of the past, resurrecting the remains of the victims of plague and the Hussite wars. Significantly, there are various opinions on using analysis in Surrealism. For example, Fotiade highlights, the view of Artaud and Fondane, that the Surrealist film practice should be illogical and not analysed with metaphorical meaning. Benjamin Fondane's *ciné-poèmes* (un-filmable yet cinematic scripts) served to "uncover the process of thought", precisely via "illogical transformation", which eschews "a metaphorical, referential mode, underpinning a psychological interpretation" (Fotiade, "Pictures" 118). Films like *Un Chien Andalou*, according to Fotiade rely on frustrating the viewers with its illogical, absent narrative, by disrupting any "metaphorical or logical links between shots", and even when reoccurring symbols are suggested, their context changes and there is never a given logical meaning to the film ("Pictures" 119). *Ghosts* could also be argued to have no decided meaning, but it is intended to evoke connections and metaphors, dependant on the response of the viewer. Furthermore, contrary to Fondane, Linda Williams views the "cutting motif" in *Un Chien Andalou* as a possible link and sees the film as a "metaphoric series", which point to questions of psychoanalysis and gender (Williams 82). This project is similarly open to analysis, but the film did not have a set meaning in mind. What is more, the editing process was employed in such a way that it would shake up

any formed narrative, allowing surprising connections to appear. Connections that would be experienced and felt rather than simply passively viewed or consumed. Even though my analysis picks on a theme of mortality, certain audiences have found that their reaction of disgust caused by the bath of pasta or stretching of the skin more shocking and meaningful than the images from the



Figure 14 *Ghosts*, uncomfortable touching.

Ossuary. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous chapter, we have memories of touching cold, slimy substances or of touching materials such as rough netting, but we can also associate further via our imagination towards feeling things we have never experienced, for example by stretching the skin on our neck to such an extent as the character in the film, and therefore, the haptic images can be felt as imagined bodily discomfort or pleasure.

Noheden notes the importance of sound in the embodied experience ("Imagination" 6), and *Ghosts* tested whether sensory impressions can carry to the viewer, even without diegetic sound effects enhancing specific actions. Based on the reactions in the screenings and comments afterwards, the audiences were still affected by the footage. Moreover, the use of music aimed to absorb and invite the viewer to look at these acts in a trance-like state, with the belief it would stimulate the viewers' associations. Indeed, the power of imagination was evident, as some viewers mentioned (imagined) that sound effects were accompanying the actions on screen. The powerful role of the imagination is also considered by the experimental/ Avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage, who believed in pursuing "knowledge foreign to language [...] demanding a

development of the optical mind, and dependent upon perception”, and arguing that “there is no need for the mind's eye to be deadened after infancy” (12-13). Švankmajer’s *Down to the Cellar* is an example of “the imagination transform[ing] reality”, because the film succeeds in producing “a feeling of tactility” (Noheden, “Imagination” 6). Therefore, the surrealist tactility in the film can trigger new sensory experiences and feeling the world from a new perspective. Importantly, as Noheden highlights, the human mimetic and analogical nature of thinking rhymes precisely with the Surrealist desire to blur or merge contradicting realities (“Imagination” 8). *Ghosts* aligns to such a perspective, demonstrating the intention of a ‘surrealist tactility’ and the role of ‘embodied imagination’. The film aimed to trigger the viewer, and the response is subjective and can be a fear of the temporariness of life, or of loneliness, a phobia, or a pleasure/ desire of something repressed.

Polednice/The Noon Witch (2012)

Polednice/The Noon Witch draws on and is named after the 19th-century Czech folklore poem of Karel Jaromír Erben. However, the main inspiration lies in the idea of a folklore story being passed on through different generations of family members, changing with each individual’s imagination, which leaves an imprint and transforms the story into a new tale altogether. The original poem describes a young mother flustered by domestic chores and motherhood, who uses the imagined figure of a witch to scare her child into behaving, resulting in tragedy as she suffocates her baby in a fearful, tight embrace, after convincing herself that the figure is really coming to kill her child. The tale could be about superstition and the power of one’s mind, which under distress results in a distortion of reality. Furthermore, the tale also connects to the material of childhood imagination,

triggered by the fragmented tactile manner of depicting the witch to build the horror, leading me to subjectively complete the picture of Polednice as a whole. Breton puts an emphasis on the power of childhood imagination, being the door to “the greatest degree of freedom of thought” (*MS* 4-5). Many Surrealist artists draw on childhood memories, for example, Švankmajer notes its influence and guides filmmakers to “surrender” to their obsessions and reach into their “childhood”, so its essence may seep into the work and make the ‘Surrealist’ film a “triumph of infantilism” (“Decalogue” 140). Indeed, obsessions, desires and fears are often born in the first childhood experience with them. Carrington’s memories of her childhood, such as “the English propertied class, the filthy tepid food and the cold draughty rooms, the distant and yet crushing family relationships”, seep into her stories and paintings in the “relish for warmth and colour, abundant and delicious herbs and foods [...] her revelling in wildness, in smells- cinnamon and musk- in the release of the imagination, and the discovery of physical sensation” (Warner 4). Furthermore, I resonate with Aberth’s observation of Carrington, seeing the preoccupation with childhood possibly as a way to exorcise “the traumatic aspects of her youth”, and recognizing that the family fairy stories can stay into adulthood, shaping one’s “personal belief system” (11-12). Similarly, Kaplan observes that the paintings of Remedios Varo are full of “childhood fantasies”, employed in “exorcising [her] adult terrors” (9). Furthermore, based on a personal experience, the use of repetition and the simple act of re-ordering and re-telling of stories into myths (fairy tales) and by experiencing them sensually, can become a new less problematic memory.

Interestingly, drawing on Erich Auerbach, Marks exemplifies the notion of ‘mimesis’, in the “lively and responsive relationship” between a story-teller and a

listener, as “each time a story is retold it is sensuously remade in the body of the listener” (SF 138). *Polednice* is inspired by such mimesis, making the story in fact part of a personal history, as the film draws on the sensory childhood memory of a bed time story. The sensory details, such as the pulsating missing skin, the rotten flesh, the wood for leg, given by the storyteller triggered bodily response in completing the missing information, imagining her musky smell, left after her hungrily devouring human organs, touching her face with bloodied and burnt hands, and long, sharp nails to tear bodies apart. Furthermore, this imagination merged with a memory of a room and its objects, which in the moment of fear became associated with (imprinted onto) the story, as well as the storyteller, and these elements are now central to my film. The description of the witch is constructed by personal imagination, beyond the description of the poem. Since the tale belongs to a childhood fear, the film plays with the notion of the invisible child observing the man who re-invented the story, and who is convinced, like the mother of the original poem, that the witch is real. For example, the man searches the woods with his super8 camera hoping to film the entity, projecting the footage in his room on the wall in hope of catching a glimpse of *Polednice*. Furthermore, when *Polednice* is seen, it is unclear if this is his nightmare or whether she lives outside of his knowledge, never seen by him, since she only appears in the film when the man is asleep.

Furthermore, the film is inspired by Breton’s view of Surrealism, as “the state where the distinction between the subjective and the objective loses its necessity and its value” (MS 86). Therefore, *Polednice* aims to merge the perspectives of the filmmaker, film and the viewer. As previously mentioned, *Polednice* is shot from the embodied voyeuristic perspective of a child curiously watching the



Figure 15 *Polednice*, a frame across the image illustrates the gaze of the hidden child.

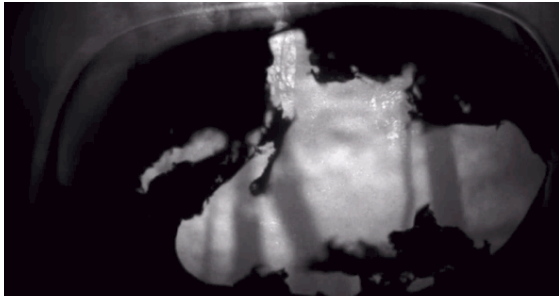


Figure 16 *Polednice*, burned holes in a film as an opening joining realities/spaces.

aimed to unify the film and the filmmaker/ viewer. The connecting hole/window was achieved by setting the film on fire while recording its projection. It serves to establish the different layers to the film, the assemblage of different viewing perspectives as well as the material of both the child's and the man's imagination. Furthermore, *Polednice* illustrates a strong preoccupation with the themes of connecting a variety of unconnectable realms, of contamination of the inside with



Figure 17 *Polednice*, a tissue membrane with a tongue.

The film set itself is both inside and outside, the walls do not separate the forest, and even the body of *Polednice* is not confined by skin. The character's imagination and dreams contaminate his material and waking experience. Furthermore, the film nurtures the uncanny uncertainty, in not making a

mysterious actions of an adult. Therefore, the self is hidden in the film, but is aimed to be felt, through the caressing camera movements over the character and his space, intruding on the character's imagination with her touch and physical closeness to him. The non-diegetic view is at times visible in the crossing over of the footage, such as in the superimposed dirty window or the film burning into an opening which

the outside. For example, the close-up of a tissue membrane with a tongue seeping through and dissolving it, illustrates the feeling of the inside or interior being exposed and spilling out.



Figure 18 Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space* (1937).

preference for either side. Allmer notes the tendency of women artists to explore the unifying of the inside/outside, for example, she describes the opening between two realities, found in a photograph of Lee Miller's, *Portrait of Space* (1937), which she calls "an alternative perspective on 'reality', proposing that reality can be perceived not from the 'window' of tradition but from a spreading, rhizomatic structure which is unstable and cannot be contained" (19). Furthermore, Allmer uses the similar idea in 'the fold', signifying the state of "in-betweenness" in merging the inside/outside space, using Deleuze's definition (22).

The 'duplicity' of the fold has to be reproduced from the two sides that it distinguishes, but it relates one to the other by distinguishing them: a severing by which each term casts the other forward, a tension by which each fold is pulled into the other. (Deleuze, *F* 34)



Figure 19 *Polednice*, uncertain space/ perspective.



Figure 20 *Polednice*, a miniature theatre set containing a miniature woodland.

This preoccupation with the uncertainty of the inside/outside is strongly illustrated in *Polednice*. For example, it opens with series of extreme close-ups of a wet, pulsating material, of inside-out skin. The next shot depicts a cage-like environment, in a tight frame, ambiguously disorientating the location of the look. Therefore, the man may be both inside the cage, and we are looking at him, or we are watching him from within the cage. The role of the forest is another example of 'folding' the inside with the outside in

Polednice. A cabinet next to the character's bed reveals a miniature theatre set



Figure 21 *Polednice*, the witch in the woods.

actual space in which a cloaked figure moves.

containing a miniature woodland that serves to join two locations, realms or realities into one. The miniature view into the forest cuts to a matching shot of an

Since Surrealist practices aim to disrupt our habitual experience, *Polednice* also employs different ways to disorientate the viewer through the space presented by the *mise-en-scène*, to induce a sense of strangeness, feeling disorientated or lost, by the viewer's embodied experience. Sobchack notes, that when one is in a space, which is not "normatively Euclidean and organized" (adult space), we return back to the childhood "hyperbolic space in which the measure of things is generated primordially by [our] own body", and which is "disorientating, unsettling, even perilous" (21). This fits with *Polednice's* illustration of the childhood experience of the forest, rooted in fear of getting lost. Sobchack draws on Freud's uncanny, as he describes the feeling "which recalls that sense of helplessness sometimes experienced in dreams [...] for instance, when one is



Figure 22 *Polednice*, lost in space.

forest in *Polednice* is disorientating, illustrated by the man walking in circles, and

lost in a forest [...] when every endeavour to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot" (CU 143-144). The

even his map is of no use in orientating himself in the space. Space which is possibly in his dream and therefore not defined by a logical means of knowledge.

Furthermore, the film presents a theme of inanimate objects being alive akin to



Figure 23 *Polednice*, a papier-mâché head.



Figure 24 *Polednice*, the miniature theatre.

those in Švankmajer's films. For example, the puppets and *papier-mâché* head are rooted in the childhood believe that objects have lives of their own. Similarly, the paintings of Remedios Varo remind us of precisely such a childhood perspective, as if every hole and every fabric fold is hiding something unexpected. In *Polednice*, the miniature theatre

comes alive in stop-motion animation, with the miniature audience running away as the curtains reveal the forest at night, accompanied by shadows and woodland animal sounds. The *papier-mâché* head is decorated with a blood drawn smile and sucks blood and later sticks out a wet tongue, licking the sharp bloodied paper. The sound effects and close-ups employed in the film correspond to Barker's description of haptic quality, which "addresses itself first and foremost to the fingertips, provoking our desire to touch, caress, squeeze and scrape the images before us" (TE 137). For example, in the actions of meat being squeezed, the wet, oozing and pulsating skin, the miniature forest in the theatre, and even the mouldy walls and dirty floors, all invite our sense of touch. Jennifer Barker

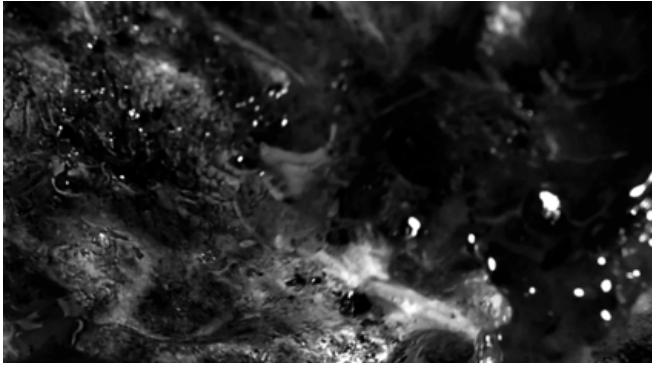


Figure 25 *Polednice*, close-up of pulsating 'skin'.

highlights the role of repulsion in the tactile image and the “disgust of touching”, for example, in the corporeal of Polanski’s *Repulsion* (1965) (Barker, *TE* 48). The

transformation of ordinary objects and sounds into something threatening, and the “eruptions and oozing of the horrific upon slick, clean surfaces” (ibid.). Arguably, the character’s home in my film is full of uncomfortable textures and can similarly trigger the reaction of repulsion. Furthermore, as Noheden notes, Švankmajer’s use of sound in *Down to the Cellar*, such as “dripping water and a constant scraping noise in the background” enhances our “embodied experience” of the space (“Imagination” 6). Similarly, the sound in *Polednice* is designed to illustrate the sensory experience of the man’s home, depicted by the sound effects of the forest, nocturnal animal noises, humming electricity, wind, rain and leaves crackling in a thunderstorm, to highlight the space as unsafe, uncomfortable and exposed.

In the view of Marks’s haptic visuality, I also aim to invite a “bodily relationship between the viewer and the image”, drawing on “the mimetic relationship between the perceiver and a sensuous object” to evoke a “sensuous response” (*SF* 164), possibly of the marvellous. The camera in *Polednice* lingers and caresses textures and the images, which are depicted as both blurry and other times sharp. Thus the audience can be invited/ forced closer to touch the grainy and blurred visual impressions, that Marks proposes as haptic. Furthermore, the textures and surfaces of things remain unseen in the unifying bigger picture, such

as the opening scene of a shiny, pulsating, blistery and bleeding texture in extreme close-up; or the soft tissue moving in and out as it is penetrated by the invisible tongue. Such incompleteness and ambiguity, can arguably trigger the viewers' own imagination in creating the objects' wholeness. Noheden notes that Švankmajer's films, employ haptic as "more traditional bodily identification" ("Imagination" 6). *Polednice*, as well as my other works, also illustrates objects in relation to being touched, depicting fingers, nails, hands, and showing the facial and bodily responses of those who touch. The film's tactile means, support the embodied analogical thinking, via mimesis, inviting the viewers to understand the film, by imagining their subjective sensory experiencing, for example, relating to a memory of camping in a cold, wet forest, by using the imagination of sensory experience to enhance the film's setting.

The props for the film are often found and old objects, full of mystery and history,



Figure 26 *Polednice*, props- found objects.

which is not essential for the viewer, as they are often only seen in short glimpses of the room. However, these objects played a crucial role in the film practice, inducing

an atmosphere for myself and the actors. The jars, magazines, photographs, maps, the super8, projector, boxes, taxidermy bears, puppets, watches and tools are all found objects from antique shops in Prague and England, as well as sacred family possessions. Švankmajer highlights the significant power of objects, "particularly old ones, [which] have witnessed all sorts of events and lives, and bear their imprint", and he suggests we "listen to them" ("Decalogue"

140). Similarly, Marks takes the notion of the Walter Benjamin's aura, and suggests, it is "the sense the object gives that it can speak to us of the past, without ever letting us completely decipher it", triggering an experience of "involuntary memory" (Marks, *SF* 81). Furthermore, for Marks the 'aura' can be almost physically felt as "a co-presence, between viewer and object" (*SF* 140). Marks's aura can thus transform the object "from something purely visual, and renders it tactile" (Noheden, *NM* 195). Hal Foster's consideration of the Surrealist object as "the *objet trouvé* [found object]" representing "the re-appearance or the re-presentation of a past event in a symbolic, altered form", and which indirectly evokes "the repressed memory of the experience" thus rhymes with this auratic quality (Fotiade, "Ready-made" 11-12). Furthermore, the Surrealists draw on Benjamin's concept, noting their aim is "to re-establish the magical aura of art as one could still find it in the so-called primitive societies or in the esoteric (hermetic) tradition [...] a systematic enterprise of 'auratic' – i.e. magical – metamorphosis of all the activities of the human spirit" (Bounoure 79; Noheden, *NM* 195). This project resonates with the view, that the spirit (aura) of the objects can be re-established through haptic images, by being close to them enough to stimulate our imagination, that the objects are indeed alive. Miriam Hansen describes the daemonic like nature of the Benjamin's auratic gaze, as the "gaze that nature appears to be returning", which "does not mirror the subject in its present, conscious identity, but confronts us with another self, never before seen in a waking state" (188). In Noheden's words, Benjamin's "auratic art and objects come alive to such an extent that they return the gaze of the viewer" ("Imagination" 7). The film *Institute Benjamenta* (1996) of Brothers Quay comes to mind, in implying such a presence of an enigmatic gaze, which Marks also

notes, “seems to belong to one of the objects or something even smaller and

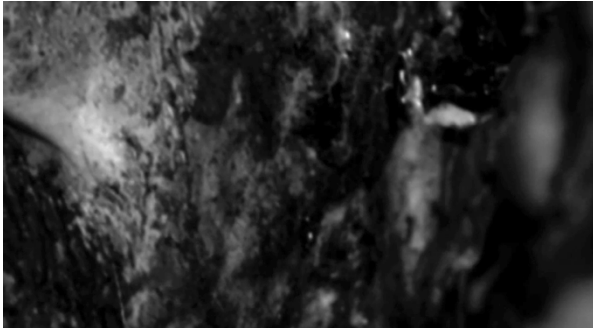


Figure 27 *Polednice*, witch's ear, mystery gaze.

more ambient – the point of view of dust, or the air” (*T* 131). Similarly, *Polednice*'s handheld and caressing camera view is presented as a gaze, which often belongs to a mysterious

beholder. For example, in the woods, the same gaze, which is watching the man (which we think belongs to the witch), also lingers on the textures of the tree trunks, yet the 'trunk' suddenly moves, revealing the ear of the witch, therefore, it presents an enigma as to who is looking. The enigmatic gaze could also belong to the viewer who is embodied in the perception, just like the listener of a bed-time story.



Figure 28 Francesca Woodman, *Space 2, Providence* (1975-76).

Furthermore, the theme of the PhD films, of merging the mind and the body, is rooted in my interpretation of Breton's *Nadja*, and is similarly employed to the work of Kusama, Mendieta, Woodman and Carrington, in the way they superimpose their imagination onto the exterior world, such as Kusama's self-obliteration. The



Figure 29 *Polednice*, camouflage.

man in *Polednice* is, for example, both hidden and visible in the spaces, often camouflaged. For example his sweaty face merges with the space via the textures

created by the shadows, light and the mouldy walls. The scene of the man



Figure 30 *Polednice*, the man blurring with the trees.

dancing in the woods shows his body blurring with the trees, he is almost transparent and dissolving the boundary between him and the trees.

The method of overlaying images

also serves to illustrate feelings and experiences, which are hard to explain in language or narrative alone, and akin to Marks's view that the tactile is often used when language and communicating knowledge is not enough.

Additionally, the film aims to imply a sense of new perspective, since it presents a reality existing in a full range of experiences of various realms, leaving the viewer frustrated and to fill in this missing information. The use of sound design and the textures of the superimposed layers, serve to ease the illogicality of the film and thus immerse the audience into the experience. Consequently, the editing also produced new meanings in using a random unplanned order of juxtapositions, for example, of watching a man dancing in a forest intersected with a hand in an extreme close-up putting a record on, and a still shot of the *papier-mâché* head with a smile drawn in blood. The surprising connections, led by chance, trigger the imagination to provide a meaning for such combinations. The objects in the film are also disruptive to their habitual context. For example, the taxidermy bears, bubble wrap and cables are used for comfort in bed instead of a blanket, and the purpose of the *papier-mâché* head and the record player imply their purpose in irrational magical ritual. The lack of context, knowledge and overview of the props, for example, the enigmatic tube that feeds the head, or the objects used in the man's bed, can trigger our imagination. Furthermore, the use of close-ups imply a special importance (aura) of the object, as Stone notes the

“Surrealists believed that staring at an object for long enough prompted it to acquire significance far in excess of its function, and the close-up was the cinematic equivalent of the stare” (30). Any object can withhold the “latent” meaning, which can be “dangerous, disruptive and malignant” prompting “thoughts of decay, perversity and sado-masochism that emerged from a subconscious response to its importance” (Stone 31). Significantly, Stone applies the association of “the latent content” with the freedom of imagination and with the “infinite potential” to propose, that our “desire” has the ability to fetishize “any object that might promise the beginning of liberty” (31).

The use of the Czech voice recording in *Polednice* is also included out of any context and placed at a random place in the film to disorientate the viewer. Moreover, the recording is illogical to both non-Czech and Czech speaking audience, as it was a spontaneous moment, recorded by my grandfather, a comical and a completely illogical dialogue. Importantly, Marks suggests that we search inside of images or objects out of our desire to unpack the secrets encoded in them to “find the memory of the senses” (Marks, *SF* 195). This old sound recording symbolically implies a recollection, and thus the viewer is invited to search within and fill in the meaning with his/her imagination. In respect to Surrealism, the film establishes an illogical form, aiming to support any meaning, especially the one thought of as the impossible. Though *Polednice* is loose in terms of interpretation, it implies a variety of interpretations, for example, referring to the subconscious in Breton’s *N*, the desire of a “descent into what is truly the mind’s lower depths, where it is no longer a question of the night’s falling and raising again (and is that the day?)” (Breton, *N* 39-40). *Polednice* could also be an ironic response to Breton’s dream in *Nadja*: “I have always, beyond belief,



Figure 31 *Polednice*, man recording, searching for *Polednice*.



Figure 32 *Polednice*, the witch bending down above the sleeping man.

hoped to meet, at night and in [the]woods, a beautiful naked woman” (Breton, *N* 39). For *Polednice*, even though cloaked, is otherwise so naked she even lacks her skin. The man is obsessively searching the forest (unconscious) for this enigmatic figure (the return of the repressed), as if he can only capture the marvellous with the lens of his super 8. He then watches the projected footage in order to catch a

glimpse of her, but since she only appears when he is asleep, he never gets to see her. The film could also imply the freedom and possibilities of a dream state, where morality no longer operates and where any desire can be explored or fulfilled. In such a light, for example, the dreaming man in *Polednice* might have wished to die or be eaten, akin to Freud’s death drive principle. As Breton discussed in his dream:

the production of dream images always depends on at least this double play of mirrors, there is, here, the indication of the highly special, supremely revealing, ‘super-determinant’-in Freudian sense of the word-role which certain powerful impressions are made to play, in no way contaminable by morality, actually experienced ‘beyond good and evil’ in the dream, and subsequently, in what we quite arbitrarily oppose to dream under the name of reality. (*N* 51)

Furthermore, the witch, can also be read in light of Breton’s convulsive beauty, which Foster suggests, “stresses the formless and evokes the unrepresentable, [...] it also mixes delight and dread, attraction and repulsion: it too involves ‘a momentary check to the vital forces,’ ‘a negative pleasure’” (28). Foster notes that “this negative pleasure is figured through feminine attributes: it is an intuition



Figure 33 Polednice, the witch.

of the death drive received by the patriarchal subject as both the promise of its ecstasy and the threat of its extinction” (ibid.). The fragments of the wet blistering texture of her skin, her black veil powerfully floating in the forest, her momentarily threateningly bending down above the dreaming man and eating the implied human flesh in the closing scene, indeed illustrate the desired witch as dangerous and the erotic as repulsive in her appearance.

Additionally, the set design played a role in the filming process, inspired by a collaborative experiment utilising chance and feeding of each other, being both creators and viewers (see Gallery 36 experiment in the appendix). Significantly, every film set employed this method, always giving the attention to the filmmaking process in creating an atmosphere often more sinister than the resulting edited film. For example, the film shoots were often undertaken at night, in an intimate crew, only surrounded by the soundscape to get the actors in the mood, and more importantly in a space which was never only filmic from certain angle. The set extended into the whole room, in fact, certain angles which do not appear in the film would have possibly better illustrated the strange atmosphere. Arguably, these methods are not far from what the Surrealists intended with their search for charging effects. The film practice also highlights, that the Surrealist view can also be found in how we make the art, how we watch it and where we experience it, and even with whom. This approach also echoes Carrington’s view in “the transformational nature of art production itself as a type of magical practice” (Aberth 9).

Necropolis: A Walk through the Graveyard (2014)

The Surrealist marvellous, understood as a sensory and subjective experience can be found in everyday reality. For example, on an aimless walk our mind can interject with the space and reveal surprising and nonsensical meanings. These powerful experiences were the inspiration for *Necropolis*, but new ones, as with the approach in all films, were also produced during the postproduction stage. The film employed chance and spontaneity, to free inspiration, tap into the imagination and to start the creative process. For example, there was no script and *Necropolis: Walk through the Graveyard* started as a recording of an aimless walk, which led to the space of cemetery, evoking the feelings and meanings of the film. I used the limited viewfinder of the camera, to avoid seeing the surroundings in its whole scale, which in turn influenced the choice of path and the framing of the footage. As a result, the film grew in front of the camera as a surprise. The textures and shapes appearing in the grass and earth, graves and shadows resembled illusions, stemming from the personal subjective imagination (of the one behind the camera), akin to Dali's paranoiac-critical method. However, in the editing stage, these recorded images also activated conscious associations, which further shaped the final film. Remedios Varo also found her own way to engage with the Surrealist practice, for example, in *Solar Music* (1955), she used the "blotting technique" to enrich "the trees of the landscape- [even though] they had already been conceived as trees before the technique was applied" (Kaplan 128). Therefore, the additional use of montage of the overlay of images with the soundscape design, also consciously further embellished the experience and produced new juxtapositions of different ideas.

The film focused on sustaining an abstract quality, for example, the mould/ moss shapes can be viewed through the viewers' own vision of shapes and associations. In *Necropolis*, the moss-like membrane layered over the film also

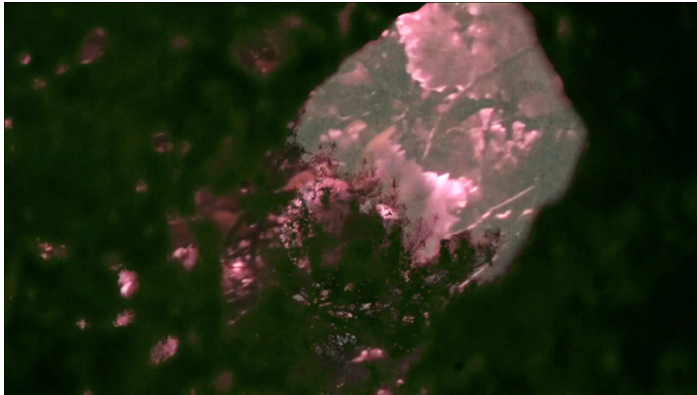


Figure 36 *Necropolis*, abstract mould/moss openings to connect different realms.

serves as an opening, like the window connecting different times and places. Filming *Necropolis: Walk through the Graveyard*, also



Figure 35 *Necropolis*, the self as both the subject and the object-blurring with space.

incidentally presented the appearance of the self, in the silhouette moving within the space. The film was finished before discovering the work of Ana Mendieta, but I find a resemblance to some of her

photographs depicting her silhouettes in stones, rivers, or in the grass overgrown by flowers. Similar to the explanation of Mendieta's art, *Necropolis* also plays with



Figure 34 *Necropolis*, shadow touching the graves.

the feelings of belonging in space and nature, as well as feeling misplaced and alone, as the earth and gravestones provoke memories of family and of a lost home. It was,

therefore, a significant discovery during the research for this thesis, that Mendieta's imprints in nature also stemmed from her yearning for her roots. Furthermore, the self, captured as a shadow, also becomes transparent and

merges with the space, being both present and yet absent. The object of the film is the shadow, which is also simultaneously the reflection of the viewing subject,



Figure 37 Necropolis, the self as the shadow.

the filmmaker. The camera uses the shadow of its body akin to Mendieta. The use of self-portraiture is common in the practice of female artists and defined by Rosy Martin

(Allmer 17), as a “way of coming into representation [...], in which the artist is both subject and object and conceives of how she looks in the sense of how she sees rather than how she appears” (Martin, xv). The film illustrates the notion of the self, which the superimposed footage material also both hides and reveals, as free in dispersing and extending the body into the wide space, rather than being trapped or fixed. This also resonates with Carrington’s view: “I realised how necessary it was to extract from myself all the personages who were inhabiting me” in order to “begin my liberation” (203-204).

Furthermore, the film aligns with other methods employed by women engaging with Surrealism. For example, the film also depicts statues resembling fallen



Figure 38 Necropolis, fallen angel statues.

angels at the cemetery, turned face down, as if flying above the world, pointing out the bigger picture over the subjective existence. Interestingly, Allmer

notes the symbol of the angel to be “one of the key symbols of women surrealists”

(26), for the angel, in Luce Irigaray's view, "attempts to bring together the divine and human, the immanent and transcendent" (Harvey 77).

The focus of the film was also led, by what Marks's defines as haptic visuality, through lingering on textures, seeking touch, and unknowingly searching for memory. For example, the shadow's hand and significantly the body casting the shadow, both engages (moves the gaze) and its body (the camera) through the spaces of the film. The internal psychology (thoughts, memories) is imprinted onto the film by the details it focuses on, relating to the visible decay, the cemetery gradually being overgrown by nature, adhering to its own laws, and thus erasing its history. The graveyard led to a contemplation of life and its finite time, triggered by the disappearing work of humankind, who are fooled to believe they are in control, a reminder of Breton's marvellous found in the *ruins*.

The Secret Life of Moths (2013)

The Secret Life of Moths, is an exercise rooted in a collaborative project, depicting a dance to represent the relationship of the masculine and the feminine as being both separate and united in one body. The dancers illustrate one being, at times the binary gender difference in sync, mimicking each other's movements, as well as the power relationship, seen in their changing tension. The dance is therefore an attempt to illustrate changing gender identity, seen as transitioning between male and female. Inspired by Lukas Moodysson's *Container* (2006), which as he writes explores "a woman in a man's body, a man in a woman's body"⁴. *Container* depicts an older overweight man, often with a younger Asian female attached to him, clutching on his back. The powerful juxtaposition of the visual observation of

⁴ as described by the director in a pressbook/flyer for the film.

the man with the narration of a softly spoken female, in what seems like her stream of conscious thoughts, illustrates the unified feeling desired for *The Secret Life of Moths*.



Figure 39 *The Secret Dance of Moths*, cocoon.

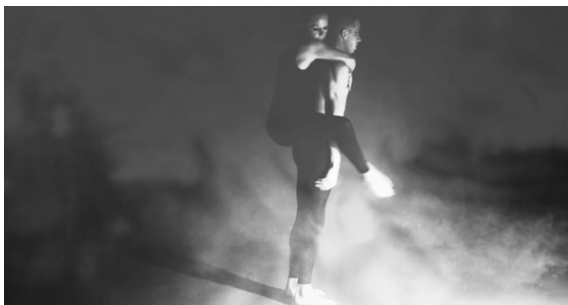


Figure 41 *The Secret Dance of Moths*, unity, in harmony.

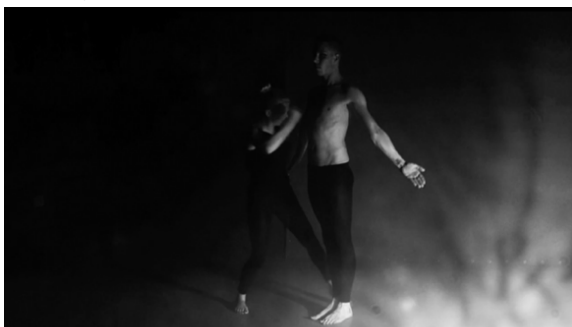


Figure 40 *The Secret Dance of Moths*, attack.



Figure 42 *The Secret Dance of Moths*, mirroring.

The dancers appear intertwined, having one body and four arms, like a transformed moth coming out of its cocoon. The activated unified body reveals a male and a female dancer, connected, holding hands and gently intertwining with each other.

They then mimic each other's movement to imply their unity, in harmony. This unity is disrupted suddenly, showing just the female dancer moving one arm up and down, gently, to suddenly attack the man, who responds with openness (not submission), the act of violence is resolved as he embraces himself and the two, though standing separately, mirror each other's movements again.



Figure 44 *The Secret Dance of Moths, multiplied.*



Figure 45 *The Secret Dance of Moths, sense of freedom.*



Figure 46 *The Secret Dance of Moths, death of one of 'the self'.*



Figure 43 *The Secret Dance of Moths, magic ritual-transformation.*

The self is then multiplied into four, but instead of all four being in sync, the footage shows them as two separate pairs by their movement. Cutting to only one pair in sync again, before they are separate again, this time, the male part illustrated in a free manner, gently moving his arms like a bird, his chest open in a manner implying a moment of liberation. This calmness is interrupted by their gentle touch as he passes out to the floor. The female dancer stands next to his motionless body, rocking her arms, lovingly, as if nurturing an upset baby. The male is suggested as dead, and the female dancer brings a healing strength, as he suddenly (in reverse) returns to his original position. The film finishes with their embrace, reclaiming their

unity. As described, the film aimed to illustrate the multiplicity of being, ever-changing unity and the melding of the feminine and masculine realms into one being, continuously moving in and out of balance.

Breton addresses “the inherent conflict between male and female principles” in *Arcane 17*, by implying that the male artist can achieve a “synthesis” by having “access to both realms of being”, and Chadwick notes, that the male Surrealists used “a powerful female principle” symbolised in “the couple or the androgyne”, celebrating a “spiritual procreation” (WA 182). For example, Marcel Duchamp had a female alter ego, but as Hopkins writes, his photographs of being Rose Sélavy “seem somewhat half-hearted”, and not fully embracing the synthesis (131). Claude Cahun on the other hand, “reinforce[d] the sexual ambiguity” by blurring the gender limitations (also possibly identifying the self as a nonbinary), represented in photographs “in a variety of guises – from body-builder to Japanese puppet – such that her femininity becomes something manifestly ‘constructed’”, thus exposing gender to be a mask and a social construct (Hopkins 127). This exercise represents the self in a process of continuous transformation, proliferating and with its multiple parts dancing in tension and finding a harmony in the world when they are not seen as different contradictions. Surrealism thus encourages dissolving of limiting categories, new “becoming and transformation” and the liberating “fluidity of identity” (Allmer 13).

Nightmare on a Train (2016)

This film is rooted in the experience with hypnagogia and daydreaming, as well as serving as a form of enchantment, and inducing a state of trance.

The idea for *Nightmare* came from reoccurring night terrors and the experience of sleep paralysis, in which a demonic, alien creature held hands around my neck, which felt uncomfortably real. *Nightmare*, like a dream, illustrates the experience analogically, for example, by the symbolism of the straitjacket, standing still, whilst everything else is in motion, as the landscape seen from the window draws

sharp motion lines across it. The character is metaphorically pulled and tortured by creatures, possibly as a form of a displacement in Freudian terms, transferring unresolved past ghosts. Sleep paralysis is often experienced as not being able to move, and usually being terrorised by something produced by our imagination. More importantly, the state of sleep paralysis evidences a state of being, in which boundaries between being asleep/awake, and between real/ imagined are blurred. The manifested entities in the dream could then akin to Freud's view, be tied to the repressed, the latent material lurking in the unconscious. Since the dream caused an uncomfortable feeling, such as not being able to move, being cut, pulled or suffocated, an analysis could imply that these manifestations stem from a fear of something returning or a fear of letting go. The symbolism of the nightmare in the film plays with the notion of the mind projecting certain feelings, connected to the unknown/forgotten material, still stored in the unconscious part of our mind. The suffering female character represents the personal experience of a fear. Furthermore, the repetition found in reoccurring night terrors fits with the repetition connected with the uncanny. The film begins with a shot of a landscape seen moving from a train's window, the camera rotates the image to



Figure 47 *Nightmare on a Train*, SnorriCam.

imply the beholder of this gaze is falling asleep. The next shot superimposes onto the same view from the train a face of a sleepwalking female,

captured with the use of a 'SnorriCam', inspired by Harmony Korine's *Julien Donkey-Boy* (1999). Korine's film uses the camera in this manner to depict a character who is schizophrenic and detached from reality. Similarly, the character

in *Nightmare* is detached, being in a limbo of both awake/asleep. The camera was attached with a harness and a tripod to the actress, so as she moved, the proximity of the camera to her face stayed the same, whilst the background moved away, resulting in a sense of unusual spacial order. The music and echoing metallic sounds, as well as the superimposed trees appearing to grow out of her head, imply the merging of the actual landscape seen from the train's window together with her daydream. She suddenly appears from a space, inspired by the set of Robert Wiene's film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). Coming forth, staring into space, a cut reveals dancing white faced figures,



Figure 48 *Nightmare on a Train*, disorientating set.

circling around the girl, and pulling her to the ground. At the same time the superimposed footage of the train landscape is still present, as well as a

superimposed shot from inside a catacomb, lit by candles, with a robed figure moving in the background. The view from the train becomes a centre of the focus, but only momentarily, as it is disrupted by an extreme close-up of a face of one of the entities looking inside the train's window. This evokes Breton's story of



Figure 49 *Nightmare on a Train*, a face of one of the entities looking inside the train's window.

Nadja's horror, of seeing a man, suddenly upside down looking through the train's window (N 107). The chalked up hands convulse on the surface of a table, before the white noise of a TV interrupts



Figure 50 Nightmare on a Train, captured in a straightjacket, sleep paralysis.



Figure 51 Nightmare on a Train, sleepwalking, being watched by the entities.



Figure 52 Nightmare on a Train, captured in a straight-jacket on a TV, outside the train.



Figure 53 Nightmare on a Train, merging with white noise.

the frame, implying the presence of hypnotic manipulation. The girl appears in a straight-jacket, held by the white hands, her face in shock and screaming, as the view in motion continuously smudges over her, as if she is trapped outside of the moving train, in a limbo state, such as sleep paralysis, unable to breath or call for help. This horror is followed by the empty train view, with close-ups of the terrorising entities calmly observing, sitting down with their gaze on the female character, no longer in a straitjacket, but as if sleepwalking past them. She reappears in a straight-jacket again, but seen on a TV, floating outside the train, which one of the figures switches off. The entity then in a very slow movement turns its gaze at the viewer, merging with the TV's white

noise, before the footage reveals the rest of the figures devouring the girl's motionless body, and slowly fading away as the train arrives at a station.

Nightmare on a Train plays with the experience of shifting between different realms of reality in a manner which aims to affect the viewer. The experience of day-dreaming on a long train journey, akin to the aimless walk, serves to establish the space, enabling a stream of inner thoughts to interject. The film rather than having a Surrealist quality, is an example of engaging with the Surrealist interest in the altered state of mind, and attempts to reproduce this state by the filmic devices, in order to affect the viewers. The hypnotic quality of the train journey was used for releasing inspiration (imagination), which also allowed the contemplation of the reoccurring night terrors and the haunting sleep paralysis. The film's illogical narrative, which is more of an associative montage, together with the soundscape, is intended to invite the viewers themselves to feel something belonging to their own imagination. Interestingly, the resulting film highlights elements, useful in the Surrealist way of thinking, such as the representation of both the outside space (the landscape), partitioned by the glass window, which also serves as a mirror, as we can see the opposite window in its reflection, therefore, providing a reminder of Lee Miller's *Portrait of Space*. Miller's photograph depicts a frame covered in a net, through which a sandy beach is seen, and on which a mirror is hanging. Furthermore, the tear in the net further highlights that spaces connect, as well as illuminating the unlimited depth, both offering reflection and the journey into the unknown. This reconciliation of the space of reflection and looking beyond also includes the inner visions (in this film's case, stemming from fears), illustrated in the film being projected onto the landscape. Similarly, Carrington also illustrates the "outside' world" of the asylum

in *Down Bellow*, as existing “beyond the border of her ‘inside’ world”, and also “outlining the various components of her mental state” as a “liminal state” on the edge of “sanity and madness” (Aberth 50). The framed train window also serves as a film screen, through the theme of watching and the merging of space/realms/realities. This is evident in the presence of the television, the character is taken outside the train and then inside of the TV outside the train. The white noise echoes my interpretation of Bogzaran’s examples of experiences in lucid dreaming, where optical knowledge based on our awake reality transits to another more sensory abstract dimension, in which sounds and light, atom like structures of the world operate.

Furthermore, Maya Deren’s “Religious Possession in Dancing” (1941), discusses the concept of hysteria, as “the intensification” of suggestibility, which “creates a hypnotic state in which the field of personal consciousness is retracted and a sub-conscious system of ideas is emancipated” (491). This aligns with *Nightmare*, as the train experience intensifies and induces a hypnotic state, in which the conscious state starts to fade away as the unconscious part of the mind takes over to relive the possibly deep-rooted phobias. Furthermore, the film also hints at the episode of Breton’s Nadja seeing simultaneously both the imagined and the real, and the uncanny in the uncertainty of not knowing which is which. According to Breton, Nadja is able to connect to the everyday with her imagination, for example, imagining a “hand flaming over the water” on their walk (N 85). The film employs the use of superimposition in order to illustrate the different realms as one. Furthermore, *Nightmare on a Train* also contains the reoccurring theme, which emerges in most of my films, via the use of footage overlay: of water, stones, clouds, mist, trees, light and other natural textures,

which penetrate and merge with the manmade spaces of houses, walls, floors, objects and the body itself.

Blackbird (2016)

Blackbird is another exercise inspired by the Surrealists' interest in dreams and drawing on dreams for inspiration, viewing it as space, where the unconscious operates, bypassing limitations imposed by the duty to societal expectations and rules. For this reason, I employed a dream journal to record any interesting elements which shock and induce the sense of strangeness or the marvellous. Furthermore, on reflection, other interesting aspects relating to Surrealism arose. For example, the character's identity unites two contradictions, in being both animal and human. This film depicts a character who behaves like a bird, along with images of mutilated bird corpses and real pigeons, as well as his art (which was my original art inspired, by a personal recollection of a dream) illustrating the fusion of bird and human anatomy. For this reason, the film implies a transition or a transformation from one form into another, or even a synthesis. Additionally, this film also reflects on the themes of repetition and self-destruction, in connection to the death drive principle, as well as illustrating the preoccupation with the sense of touch.



Figure 54 *Blackbird*, drawings of a dream.

The initial inspiration for the film draws on my dream journaling, which aided in making the props, set and the costume. One of these dreams depicted being amongst birds, rather than watching them from the usual human perspective, it even involved being able to fly, by holding onto a



Figure 55 *Blackbird*, dream-inspired art on the set.

dead bird's wings. This experience was best illustrated through drawing, later used in the film design on the set. Another dream, important in the treatment, was a sensory and claustrophobic, out of body experience, in which the body felt trapped by the piles of things in a small room, to such an extent, I had to climb over their sharp edges. Furthermore, the house was windowless, a reoccurring element in most of the recorded dreams. Lastly, I drew from a nightmare, again depicting an eerie house, but this time bare, apart from a single bedsheet on the floor. As I observed, from a strange perspective (as if attached to the ceiling), a family member who had just passed away, crawling in from a dark space under the white sheet, rocking inside it and then taking his own life. This illogical nightmare was haunting and traumatising. Therefore, *Blackbird* was shaped like a collage, patched together from these different experiences imagined during sleep.

On reflection, the film presents a number of themes, which can be arguably relevant in connection to Surrealism. For example, the main character appears

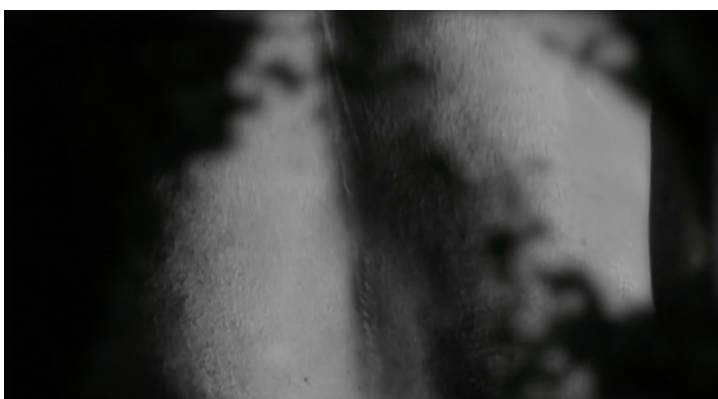


Figure 56 *Blackbird*, painful body movements.

to be disconnected from his human body and seeks to transform into a bird. The film represents his relationship to his physical form by his often aggressive behaviour towards his body, but also by his shock at catching his



Figure 57 Blackbird, disturbing reflection in a mirror.

human reflection in the mirror, which disrupts the character's idea of the self as being a bird. Furthermore, the mirror is hidden in a box and even

further buried in the soil inside of a wooden trunk. During one of his dreams, he hears a bang, and urgently looks for the mirror box, as if someone might have been in his room whilst he was asleep, and indeed the trunk is empty. This realisation is so distressful to him, he panics that he will be revealed, imagining himself inside a straight-jacket, as he tries to self-comfort, rocking under the bed sheet (as envisioned in my nightmare). This distress causes the man to try open his door, to which he has no key, almost like a metaphor for not being able to connect with himself, after which he finds the box with the mirror and breaks it.

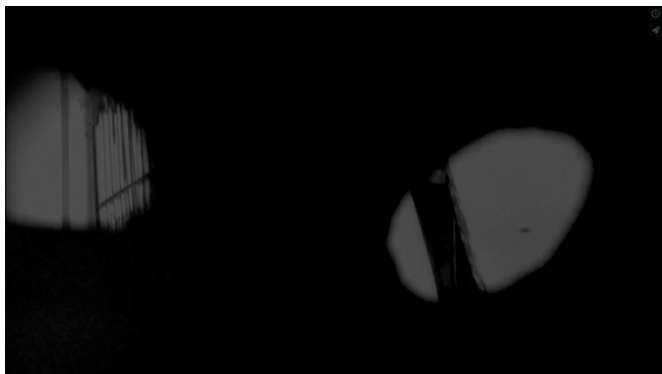


Figure 58 Blackbird, the inside of the bird's face of the mask.

The film then shows the man put on human sized wings, slowly watching the inside of the bird face of the mask he puts on, shot from his point of view. The man's POV reveals a shadow on the wall showing him with the wings, moving like a birdman. The film concludes, with his feet hanging in the air, before a colour film reveals the birdman free in the outside space. The



Figure 59 Blackbird, the man's feet hanging in the air.

ending could imply he has hung himself, or it might be an illogical combination created by the fusion of different dreams. The exercise proved that the manifest material, the recollected story of a dream is given meanings on awakening. However, these literal associations do not necessarily reveal the latent meaning behind the dream. Importantly, the character's being is illustrated by the sensory depiction, such as his slapping, moving and painfully embracing his body, as if to induce the becoming of the bird. Furthermore, the dream of being amongst other birds and physically feeling like one via the strange embodied experience, is thus illustrated in the film in the man's mimetic behaviour, such as his arms flapping,



Figure 60 Blackbird, mimesis.

head movements, crouching on a stool and making 'bird' sounds. Interestingly, the symbol of a bird-human hybrid is often depicted in Surrealist art, for example,

Ernst and his 'Bird Superior' Loplop alter ego (Hopkins 42), but also by Carrington, Tanning or Fini. Chadwick notes, that Leonor Fini often explored the unification of human form with the "bestial" in her art, to reclaim "lost powers", believing that "the magical power of animals may help humans to understand their own connection to a more primordial nature" (WA 188). The birdman in the film also aims to reconnect with something forgotten and powerful, as well as aiming to awake the senses, as if the human form is too numb, and relies mainly on the optical (mirror). Lowenstein also notes, that Surrealism aims at "restoring [the] sense of the human to its often repressed, hyper embodied animal origins", for "humanity" lies in "its physical, material animality in ways others were loath to consider" (8). Similarly, Creed notes, that David Cronenberg, akin to Ernst, Dali

and Lautréamont, “explores surreal states of bodily transformation and couplings with other life forms” (131). Importantly, Lautréamont described the Surrealist notion of beauty as “the fortuitous meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table [...] the cultivation of the effects of a systematic bewildering”



Figure 61 *Blackbird*, humanoid-bird.

(Breton, *MS* 275). Therefore, this beautiful unity of contradictions and impossible forms is represented in the creation of the birdman.

Furthermore, *Blackbird* aims to illustrate an embodied experience, for example, through a series of extreme close-ups depicting naked body parts moving in a painful manner, enhanced by the exaggerated sound effects, in order to highlight the sensory quality of physical pain. For example, his sadomasochistic actions: such as hurting his neck, implied by the sounds, and his bones cracking as he moves his body parts, in a manner which is possibly physically limited to his anatomy. Likewise, in the image of him scratching his nails against the wall, which



Figure 62 *Blackbird*, body parts in discomfort.

is often associated with a reaction of bodily discomfort. These strategies are meant to translate the discomfort to the viewers, affirmed by Barker. The viewers are

encouraged to interact with their body in the film, reacting, mimicking and experiencing these unnatural movements and sensations viscerally.

The realms of imagination (dream) and reality are also united in the film's set, which acts as a metaphor for a state of mind, in which the real and the imagined, the conscious and unconscious are unified. Breton associates space with "his own search for self-knowledge", as Chadwick notes in *Nadja*, Breton arranges "the course of psychic reality through the physical world" (WA 34). The space in *Blackbird* could also be an analogy for the man's unconscious, with its boxes of secrets, illogicality and dreaming opposed to the world outside of his door, ruled by rationality, where he fears he would be put into a straitjacket. The imagined liberation of the free space at the end of the film could be his retrieval to a fantasy world (akin to Freud's sublimation as described by Breton), or a transition from life to afterlife. However, there is no set meaning behind the film, it is open to any interpretation, contemplation and as an experience.

The photographer Francesca Woodman (1958-1981), who is also associated



Figure 63 Francesca Woodman, *Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island (1976)*.

with Surrealism, highlights the search for her own subjectivity/identity precisely in the depiction of the body in a space I resonate with. She often illustrates decayed, empty and abandoned spaces, in which her body erases "her fledging statements of self" (Posner 167-

168). Woodman's haunting photographs evoke sensory feelings, such as claustrophobia and alienation, and can be described as uncanny and beyond words. I find a similar interest in illustrating the body in the spatial geography of the room, which for me is windowless, with a



Figure 64 *Blackbird*, claustrophobic space.

high arched cave-like ceiling, but otherwise small and claustrophobic, lacking any utilities, only having a bedsheet on the floor, and a ladder in a corner, which the man uses to

hide under, which like Woodman's use of the door in the picture *Untitled* is useless as a safe shelter. At the same time, the character is surrounded by clutter, which can often conjure a feeling of safety. The idea was to produce the uncertain feeling swinging between discomfort and safety, the feeling of both being empty and full, lonely and suffocating all at the same time. Furthermore,



Figure 65 *Blackbird*, watching from the man from a ceiling, inspired by a dream.

the camera angles are used in an attempt to illustrate the perspective experienced in one of the dreams, such as, from above the man, as if watching from the ceiling. The viewer is

also placed in an uncomfortable visceral position, for example, by the camera's low angle, under the character, aimed to induce the feeling of hiding yet feeling exposed by the close proximity. Additionally, the fragmented depictions of the body in the extreme close-ups also serve to imply the sense of lack, and of feeling incomplete.

The Surrealists only draw on certain aspects of the psychoanalytic study, such as their interpretations of the unconscious mind, which holds imagination, inspiration, dreams and furthermore the repressed (latent) material, as well as

the pleasure principle Eros. They only applied the parts of Freud's notions, which fitted with their way of thinking and, and as Foster notes, for example, ignored the death drive. Similarly, I follow only certain ideas of the Surrealists' interest, and thus lack the fullness of Freud's theories, but also have an additional fascination for the principle of Thanatos, the death drive and the uncanny. The death drive is defined as "self-destructive, rather than other-destructive", furthermore, one does not gain pleasure, and death "is the ultimate release of tension", it is "the ultimate experience of stasis and complete calm" (Thurschwell 88). Therefore, re-enacting experiences of horror can serve as "a rehearsal" for death, importantly, "the deaths we experience are never our own- they are the deaths of family members, friends, loved ones which we must negotiate" (88-89). After WW1 and through witnessing its effects on traumatised soldiers, Freud adapted the pleasure principle theory, focusing, for example, on why we dream repeatedly of disturbing things and began to connect these neurotic illnesses with the haunting "memories and fantasies of childhood which were never properly understood" (86-87). Therefore, he proposed the sufferers "repeat and replay their pasts" which they cannot escape, and which manifests in the physical "symptom of hysteria" (Thurschwell 87). Since psychoanalysts use repetition in the revisiting of the trauma, in order to form an understanding of it and be in control of it (87-88). Hal Foster serves an interesting analysis, connecting Surrealist practice with the Freudian death drive to highlight the Surrealists' interest in sadism. The death drive, Foster writes is: "tinged with eroticism", and "pleasure might be felt in destruction and desire aroused by death" (13). Through applying Freud, Foster explains, that the male Surrealist work often depicts sadism "directed at figures of woman", which are "compounded with punishment" as the woman represents the threat of castration "to the patriarchal subject" (13).

Furthermore, Foster concludes, that Surrealists employed “uncanny discoveries of psychoanalysis [...] to exploit them: i.e., to use the uncanniness of the return of the repressed, the compulsion to repeat, the immanence of death for disruptive purposes- to produce out of this psychic ambivalence a provocative ambiguity in artistic practice” (17). Admittedly, I engage with psychoanalysis also only on such a shallow level, and cannot interpret the true meaning of my dream. But I recognise that *Blackbird* illustrates sadomasochistic tendencies in finding pleasure in the destruction of the body, avoiding punishment, aiming to control fears, and searching for answers in the primordial senses. The film contemplates the idea of freedom, personal/social but also spiritual and sensory. The body is both freeing and entrapping, it could stand for not fulfilling physical freedom, or for feeling trapped by our own body, and society confining our body's



Figure 66 *Blackbird*, freedom.

gender/form. The theme of birds can, therefore, also stand for the yearning for freedom, for freeing one's identity, when we feel repressed by external

circumstances, such as by the societal norms, but also being trapped by one's own doing.

Mortido (2017)

This last film is an exercise considering the Surrealist possibility of time, merging past and present, and illustrating the uncanny (marvellous) moments, which can be triggered and experienced during a heightened state of being, or for example, during a traumatic event. Therefore, this film predominantly explores the notion

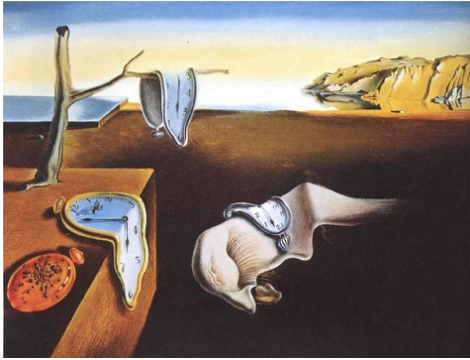


Figure 67 Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*.



Figure 68 Remedios Varo, *Revelation or the Clockmaker*.

of time experience, depicted via a collage of images and pieces of music, to blur together childhood memories with the present moment of making the film. Lowenstein highlights, that the film *L'Âge d'Or* exemplifies the 'Surrealist principles', for example, by "a ferocious attack on linear time as the trustworthy keeper of social, historical, and moral order" (186). Surrealist artists often emphasise and question the notion and reality of time, for example, Salvador Dalí *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), turned clocks "into soft, malleable forms rather than hard, precise ones" (Lowenstein 186). Similarly, Remedios Varo's *Revelation or the Clockmaker* (1955), illustrates clocks in the same frame/ same time, yet each standing clock has a man dressed according to a different period in time, at the centre of the painting is a clockmaker of the Newtonian "uniform and unchanging" time system (Kaplan 174-175). Varo plays with Einstein's notion of time being relative, illustrated by the shock of the disruptive wheel storming inside the room, implying that "time is not fixed", because it is experienced "differently, according to [individual's] frame of reference", and thus cannot be "trapped" (175). Therefore, *Mortido* approaches the Surrealist principle of disrupting the limiting view of time as a state of constancy, by being open to other dimensions, and to the process of becoming. For example, the experiencing of time under significant distress, which intensifies our sensory being, can affect the perceived sense of duration. Being near death, for example, makes an otherwise short length in the

Newtonian time sense, feel long enough to recollect one's whole life. Agnès Varda's film *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1962) is a good example of illustrating this subjective and individually different experiencing of time. The protagonist is affected by the traumatic experience of waiting for a medical result, to determine if she has a terminal illness, causing her to also suddenly interact with the everyday in a new and sensory way. For example, engaging with strangers and experiencing the city in a new way, compared to her usual unheightened state of mind. The 'short' time implied in the title as "5 to 7" is suddenly long enough for many adventures, including even the spontaneously found relationship. Her newly activated senses are felt through the use of Varda's sound and *mise-en-scène*, which enhance 'ordinary' aspects of the world, reflecting the character's own fear. For example, a street artist swallowing frogs and purging them out is shocking, analogically implying the sense of dread and fear experienced in relation to her health. *Mortido* similarly illustrates the dread triggered by waiting for something that can disrupt one's whole life, and the trauma which intensifies all the senses, including the experience of time. The disrupted and uncertain time is illustrated as a limbo state. Švankmajer states, that the "only one tiny physical act that separates dreams from reality" is the "opening or closing" of our eyes ("Decalogue" 141). The mysterious male narrator in *Mortido* repeats "close your eyes and go to sleep", always in connection to the dancing Angel of Death, implying the state of in-betweenness, but also viewing daydreaming as magic, which keeps the lost person alive. The childhood memories interject with the enhanced perception of objects, depicted by close-ups and lingering shots, as well as by sound memories. For example, the children and street noises, (reminiscing of a random moment). Importantly, the film's narrative is illogical, the

dying man and the child (the little girl, being a memory of the adult narrator



Figure 69 *Mortido*, childhood memory.



Figure 70 *Mortido*, connecting time via memory.



Figure 71 *Mortido*, memory image.

of an older video of the little girl, as well as the Icelandic volcano, suggest they belong to the man. The film illustrates a state of mind which unifies the child (the past) with the man in that present moment. Just like Varda's film, *Mortido* also depicts how the everyday, affected by the 'countdown', becomes somewhat new. The sound effects and music, the use of close-ups and shots lingering on objects illustrate the sensory turning of the mundane into something significant. Furthermore, *Mortido* predominantly focuses on the sense of touch, for example, akin to Mark's understanding of haptic visuality, in drawing onto textures and

experiencing this distortion), are not from the same time and therefore cannot be logically together, yet they are united at a table and at a church organ in the same frame. Their minimal interaction implies they do not see each other, other than in the two moments she puts his jacket on him, and as he smiles at her as he shows her how to play the organ, which is their shared memory. The man is also recollecting his life, and though it is unclear whose memories are which, as they merge in the film, the glimpses

indicating closeness, which seems crucial in relation to ‘holding’ onto someone we are about to lose. The haunting presence of triggered memories also relates to Remedios Varo’s paintings, for example, *Visit to the Past*, in which “the past, like a shadow self, comes to dominate the present” (Kaplan 148). This experienced unity between the past and the present also highlights the mind’s imaginative power, as well as thinking of time as a process. Furthermore, female artists engaging with Surrealism, often “challenge the entire edifice of Western [and patriarchal] thought” (Allmer 26-27), for example, by the tendency to move away from the “object to process, from an ontology of being to one of the becoming” (Meskimmon 3). The filmmaker Maya Deren was greatly drawn to film’s ability to “manipulate the time and space of reality” (Jackson 49). Deren proposes, that her films highlight “the time quality of a woman”, because:

time is built into her body in the sense of becomingness and she sees everything in terms of it being in the stage of becoming [...] her whole life from a very beginning is built into her, it is the sense of becoming [...] I think that my films, putting as much stress as they do upon the constant metamorphosis, one image is always becoming another [...] it is what is happening that is important in my films, not what it is in at any given moment, this is a woman’s time sense. (00:16:35-17:42)⁵

My view of time as a constantly transformative process, thus strongly resonates with Deren’s statement, as well as aligning with Deren’s term ‘vertical filmmaking’, which stands for the possibility of enabling the viewer to connect to the emotions “from a particular image, or juxtaposition of images” (00:00:45-57)⁶. The female filmmaker, Barbara Hammer also uses Deren’s concept of time and vertical filmmaking to explore her personal trauma. For Hammer vertical filmmaking is putting her feelings in film, via “layering, in which many impositions of images come together, along with sound” (00:01:00-07). Her film, *A Horse is not a*

⁵ Deren in Kudláček’s documentary *In The Mirror of Maya Deren* (2001).

⁶ Hammer in *Modern Women: Barbara Hammer on Maya Deren* (2010).

Metaphor (2009), for example, depicts her eye coming through a horse's eye and at the same time superimposing footage of a bold figure and a hospital bed (getting chemotherapy), as well as a layer showing a wide open space with a horse running freely, to illustrate "all those things we can experience in one moment" (Hammer 00:01:09-49). Additionally, based on my viewing of Hammer's film, I believe, that sharing even such a subjective experience via the tactile embodiment and superimpositions, can connect, touch other individuals, not only through human empathy, but also by their mimetic and analogical imagination, relating to their own lives. This is precisely the exact method and intention of the superimpositions that were also produced in *Mortido* to illustrate the Surrealist representation of alternative reality. Furthermore, it also demonstrates, that Deren's work and her way of thinking about film, is relevant to Surrealism.

However, depicting emotional and subjective experience is also problematic, for the Surrealists eschew anything too personal or emotional. Though women artists associated with Surrealism perhaps depart more readily from this assertion by their shared focus on subjectivity. Carrington, for example, continuously included the self, personal childhood memories, nervous breakdowns and painful life episodes in her work. However, she also transforms/ abstracts these real events into new and original myths. Carrington met Pierre Mabille, and read his *Mirror of the Marvellous* (1940), which depicts "numerous folk traditions that focused on magic", and it affirmed the nature of her work, to transform her autobiographical stories into a world of different esoteric traditions, full of alchemy, magic and folklore, as a way "to exorcise her traumatic experience" (Aberth 48). The "intensely personal, visceral" *Down Below* (1944), is according to Aberth, "a glimpse into the very heart of madness" (49), but it is also lifting "the veil of

ordinary sight [...] into another dimension" (7). Carrington's personal experience is therefore still relevant to Surrealism. *Mortido*, similarly to Carrington's work, draws on personal pain and a breakdown in the creation of a world, which fuses esoteric themes from Czech folklore, dreams and also additional elements produced by synchronicities and collaboration. The film is also marked by the process of re-editing, transforming over time into various versions, and becoming something new with each edit and importantly also serving as a therapeutic working through a traumatic experience.

Admittedly, the addition of *Mortido*'s personal voice-over, for the recorded stream of consciousness, also clearly implies/ reveals the meaning of the film, a father dying and the moment of death. Therefore, if *Mortido* was presented without the aforementioned voice-over, the film's ambiguity would then allow and possibly trigger other meanings and discoveries and akin to Breton's living focal point, move the viewers more. Interestingly, Marks notes, that "many works of intercultural cinema rely on spoken words to present cultural counter memories [...], to say what they cannot show", as the "[v]oices, not only informative witnessing or testimony, but also casual conversation, the texture of talk, and the simple presence of a clear or incoherent voice in counterpoint to the image, activate cultural memories", and "the words" can even "become more poetic" as "an evocative layer of their own" (*SF* xv). The voice-over could be also seen as a poetic texture, juxtaposing the images. Furthermore, Švankmajer summarises Surrealism as "a journey into the depths of the soul, like alchemy and psychoanalysis" (Hames 211), proposing to "liberate" ourselves via the "anti-aesthetic attitude" of "self-therapy" in regards to creativity, for art like film "can liberate a viewer" only if it liberates "its author first" ("Decalogue" 141).

Additionally, *Mortido* screened at different film festivals and was often received with tears, with a number of viewers sharing their own personal stories, which differ from the unique loss presented in the film. Particularly one man felt triggered to think about a daughter he had left behind in his youth, and another feared for their personal health. In this respect, according to the reaction in the screenings, *Mortido*, even with the problematic (emotionally charged and personal) voice-over, still arguably triggered and liberated the audience, who recognised and used the film as their emotional exorcism. The film is not special in this quality, as undoubtedly most films, even those which are not directly emotionally charged, can trigger a certain something we recognise (are touched by) or are left puzzled by some profound effect. Therefore, even a personal film can trigger something universal, 'uncanny', which reminds us of something unique to us, and which can then serve the collective. Furthermore, the Q&A at the Brighton Scallarama Festival in 2018, revealed the interesting associations of the aforementioned viewers, as well as many comments describing the film as "hypnotic and sensory", "like a dream", "immersion in a state of a loss", and as an experience of waiting and sensing reality differently during a traumatic experience.

Significantly, the process of making of *Mortido* also engaged with the chance principle, drawing on a number of coincidences occurring prior to and during the film production. For example, the film's initial loose treatment written on a single page, was a mere poetic montage of illogically juxtaposed visuals, in a nonlinear narrative form, including a butterfly, a blood filled bathtub, a house which breaths and sees, and an extravagant and macabre dinner party. Nearing the time of the



Figure 73 *Mortido*, the found butterfly.



Figure 72 *Mortido*, macabre dinner party inspired by a dream.

planned shoot, I came across a butterfly by complete coincidence on top of a bookshelf, similarly, the daddy-long-legs was found on location during the filming. The carpet placed over the grass in an abandoned garden was also encountered by chance, which produced a disturbing feeling, fitting the uncanny in Foster's view, as if the carpet might be

hiding something repressed. This carpet experience was part of the original treatment, like the dinner party, and was thus implemented in the film, in a scene where the child throws flowers on a carpet as one would do inside a coffin of a loved one. Furthermore, the main protagonists of the film were discovered as if by pure chance, the child was a new neighbour, who was also Eastern European and shared an interest in the morbid and reminded me of myself. Meeting Paul, who plays the father in the film, can only be described as a chance encounter, via an acquaintance, who was too scared to visit this musician alone for business

reasons because of Paul's eccentric behaviour. Meeting Paul was somewhat an act of fate, it was revealed he was undergoing chemotherapy (successfully) at the time and therefore, he was happy for the distraction to star in a film. The film's poetic death theme was therefore additionally influenced by Paul's own experience, and it was somewhat a premonition to my father's ill health. Since the film was influenced by Paul: his house, illness and personal interests (the church organ, which was installed in his living room), including the piece of music which we collaboratively composed. *Mortido* is thus a collaborative exercise, full of mysterious synchronicities and premonitions, as well as a therapeutic process for both me and Paul, in contemplating, preparing and dealing with death.

Breton notes, that children "are weaned on the marvellous, [but] later on they fail to retain a sufficient virginity of mind to thoroughly enjoy fairy tales" (MS 15). Furthermore, "[t]he fabric of adorable improbabilities must be made a trifle more subtle the older we grow", and explains, that adults often look for the marvellous in "[f]ear, the attraction of the unusual, chance, the taste for things extravagant" (Breton, MS 16). Interestingly, Breton also contemplates, that there may be "beings whose behaviour is as strange to [us as ours] may be to the mayfly or the whale", and "these creatures" can "completely escape" our "sensory system of references through a camouflage of whatever sort one cares to imagine" (MS 293). Therefore, it is when we feel powerless, afraid and "conscious of the workings of chance" triggered by traumatic disturbances, that these hypo-thetical beings "mysteriously reveal themselves to us [...] to the point where they become credible" (ibid.). The film illustrates the role of the old fear in such visionary

intentions, creations and believes. Furthermore, the Angel of Death, is illustrated

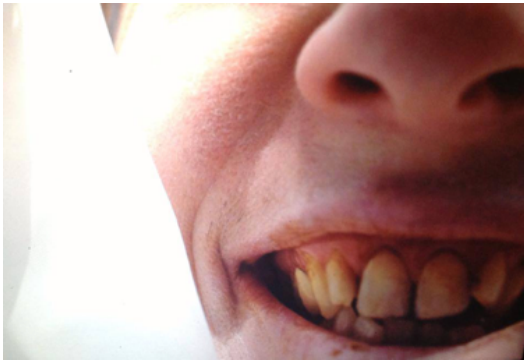


Figure 74 *Mortido, the androgynous angel of death.*

as an enigmatic entity imagined by the child, to make sense of suffering and parental loss, for example, smiling and laughing in a way that is sinister considering the context. However, the film also implies, that death is an

immanent part of life and not purely evil. For example, before the father's death, the girl witnesses that plants rot and insects and butterflies die. Chadwick notes, that women often emphasise the female qualities "with the magic powers of nature", for example in sync with the moon (WA 182-183) and Leonor Fini even viewed women figures, as responsible for all "Being" (Chadwick, WA 188). The Angel of Death similarly represents nature's order, in which logic and humans are powerless. Like the witch in *Polednice*, the Angel is also a powerful female, but



Figure 75 *Mortido, Angel of Death imagined by a child.*

masked, desexualised and androgynous, depicted in extreme close-ups, often focusing on their teeth or skin, which are threatening, mutilated or even appearing inanimate.

Furthermore, the film also plays with the notion of the Surrealist poetic image, considered as the beautiful unity of distanced contrasts, for example, in the food assemblages made for the decadent dinner party. The dishes are made out of ingredients which are thought of as unconnectable, such as strawberry custard, raw fish with shiny eyes, old rotting apples, chocolate cakes, leaves, decaying

flowers and sweet rainbow sprinkles, to shock the analogical sensory associations. The food is also served on old china dishes, with medical



Figure 76 *Mortido*, using food as the poetic image.

instruments for
cutlery, and the
guests also eat,
repulsively, with their
hands wearing
synthetic costume

gloves, which are stained by the fish and custard. Furthermore, food is often illustrated as unappetising in the Surrealists' artwork, for example, Dalí's cookbook *Les Dîners de Gala* (1973), or Švankmajer's depiction of Czech delicacies in a repulsive way, produced by the enhanced sound effects and the extreme close-ups of the foods' oozing, wetness and gooeyness. Similarly, Carrington experimented with cooking and food "bordering on the inedible", associating it "with art production" (Aberth 54). In fact, Varo and Carrington together "us[ed] kitchen as their laboratory" in an occultic sense (Kaplan 95), believing that there is "no differences between the cooking pot and the alchemist alembic" (Warner 11).

To conclude this section, I believe *Mortido* still engages with Surrealism, for example, in the depiction of: the heightened experiencing of space, time and the sense of touch; the transformation of personal material and factual elements into a new myth/ story; the juxtapositions illustrating the poetic image; and using the chance principle found in the collaboration with Paul, as well as in the many synchronicities.

Conclusion

This research was led by my aim to answer various questions related to Surrealist practice. For example, exploring if the focus on a sensory experience can serve as a possible guide in filmmaking towards what we might refer to as a Surrealist 'intention' and how this might be communicated to the viewer. Secondly, I found, that my practice resonates with the Surrealist engagement and strategies of the female artists. Thirdly, the thesis attempts to explore the role of the sensory quality on the perception and imagination of other individuals. Fourth, the research considers the extent to which the films of this project succeed in inducing the uncanny quality of the marvellous (and, if so, *how* they achieve this). Finally, the thesis evaluates how addressing all the above questions results in engagement with Surrealist *practice*.

In order to answer these questions, the research revealed a need to understand the Surrealist movement and the goals of its artists and explore the themes present in Surrealist art to aid in establishing a view on Surrealist concepts, such as the marvellous, the poetic image or the Surrealist object. The Surrealists also realised, that the unconscious is an enigma that cannot be definitively pinned down. The Surrealists' methods and work also often explores certain darker Freudian principles such as the uncanny and the death drive, for example, in the presence of repetition through which they were possibly dealing with loss or preparing for trauma (Foster 21). I often view the marvellous in relation to the uncanny, the return of the repressed or the uncertainty, which brings into the equation the fear of death and possibly the revisiting of trauma. This darker view of the marvellous suggests that our imagination can evoke a memory of fear or

repressed trauma. The marvellous is also understood in this project, as feeling the strangeness of unifying contradictions and disrupting any definite and binary understanding of the real. These moments are defined by André Breton in *Nadja* as the “indefinable reaction at the sight of extremely rare objects or upon our arrival in a strange place”, and the “lack of peace with ourselves provoked by certain juxtapositions, certain combinations of circumstances which greatly surpass our understanding” of rational activity (Breton, *N* 20). Similarly, the aim of the Surrealist object is to disrupt our expectations and perception of its expected utility in order to make new connections, even between what feels unconnectable, best captured by Reverdy’s poetic image, as “a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities” (Breton, *MS* 20), intending to produce a shock and disrupt our everyday perception. In the films produced for this thesis, the props and sets play a crucial role in engaging with these qualities of the Surrealist object. For example, in *Mortido*, the inedible food assemblage in the party is poetic in connecting inedible combinations of ingredients. While the notion of magical transformation is present in most of the work, for example, in *Polednice* a miniature theatre turns into a forest and inanimate everyday objects become alive. In *Blackbird*, a man transforms into a bird, manifesting his imagination into material reality. The illogical qualities of everyday objects also transmute into new values. The fusion of contradictions is also visible in *Nightmare on a Train* - such as the images of a woman floating inside a TV outside of a moving train. These contradictions are also present in *Mortido* in the close-ups of objects which have no purpose, yet the camera lingers on them in fragmented close-ups, inviting viewers to imagine connections and meanings for themselves – a process akin to the contradictions that are experienced in a dream. The films also experiment

with the Surrealist practice with automatism, which Breton recognised cannot be authenticated but indeed serves to produce a surprising work.

Furthermore, since the terms, such as the marvellous or the uncanny are problematic to capture in language, film theorists tend to agree, that the only criterium of judging if Surrealist elements are present when induced by the films themselves, lies with the viewers. My work often utilised the chance principle for finding inspiration, which also led to surprising discoveries in the process of making the films. For example, brought about by dreams, sleep paralysis, traumatic experiences, as well as the reflection on the chance in the encounters with the actors or coming across the props as if by fate (viz. *Mortido*). Finally, the editing methods, such as superimpositions and randomly juxtaposing images on the timeline also served to let the film's elements arise as a surprise. This method was demonstrated in *Ghosts*, which engaged with the creation of poetic images, by producing juxtapositions in shaking them up on the timeline.

The research also highlights, that male Surrealists (in line with Freud) tended to associate women with hysteria and saw them as the 'Other', as a source of inspiration, connected to the alternative realms of logic and capable of the unique artistic expression that the Surrealists were seeking. Furthermore, this project has also found that the strategies of my creative engagement with Surrealism are similar to those employed by other female artists. This is especially apparent in the exploration of the self as muse and of seeing identity in a process of a constant transformation. Like in Leonora Carrington's work, my films often transform real traumatic experiences into new myths, in a process towards self-knowledge which consequently became also therapeutic. *Necropolis: A Walk*

through the Graveyard, which started as an exercise drawing on a spontaneous, aimless walk in style of Breton's *Nadja*, also resembles the work of Ana Mendieta, sharing the same sense of loneliness and longing for roots found in her work. As has been demonstrated in the preceding film analysis, *Blackbird* and *Nightmare on a Train* both use dreams for inspiration and exploration, which often link to childhood and traumatic experiences, and artists such as Bogzaran utilise states of dreaming for therapeutic outcomes. Therefore, the female strategies include and explore 'the self' to find self-knowledge but also to liberate the female experience in the art world and the patriarchal society. For example, in the departure from established notions of gender, by depicting powerful androgynous figures unified with the universe and nature. This exploration of the self, is also evident in the attempt to self-obliterate and merge with the world, connecting to past spaces and times (Woodman and Mendieta), to free the ego to control a mental illness (Kusama), or work through personal events and life stories, by transforming them altogether into new myths (Carrington). For this reason, I find the personal aspect, which is eschewed by the male Surrealists, to play an essential role in the female Surrealist outlook, demonstrated by the transformative process of their practice and for example, expanding reality of real-life events.

Furthermore, this practice highlights my focus on embodiment and the senses. For example, as the films demonstrate, by drawing the gaze towards the sense of touch in caressing textures; or focusing on close-ups of either blurry and enigmatic or sharp and repulsive images, which act to invite the viewers to not only *touch* but to evoke a synesthetic experience, to *feel* the films with different means of knowledge. Therefore, the second chapter of the thesis draws on

phenomenology in relation to film and film spectatorship, establishing the views on the relationship between sensory qualities of films and the viewer's embodiment. This analysis placed a particular emphasis on finding connections between my personal tendency to use a sensory expression and that of the intercultural films explored by Laura Marks, of artists, "whose sensoria are not completely at home" (SF 230). Since I am living between two cultures, and somewhat recognise this perspective as displaced and always incomplete, this explained the filmmaking inclination to focus on textures and senses. I align, in ways similar to the intercultural films described by Marks, with the unknowingly present force of longing for the place of origin, which leads to the tendency to recollect and reconnect with past memories. Combining a meditation on these tendencies together with my aim to engage with Surrealism, led the research into questioning the role haptic visuality in relation to Surrealism, which Kristoffer Noheden significantly affirms. However, Noheden notes the different considerations of reality, between the intercultural haptic strategies in film and those in films relevant to Surrealism. While intercultural cinema deals with "the memory of actual events", films associated with the lens of Surrealism employ imagination and invite the viewer to collaborate, involving the process of "analogical associations" ("Imagination" 6). The films produced for this PhD, such as *Polednice* and *Mortido*, utilised childhood vision, primarily in order to serve as an alternative perspective of experience, and evoke the Surrealist (Švankmajer's) use of "memories of childhood to de-familiarise the world from the blasé and utilitarian adult viewpoint" (Noheden "Imagination" 6). For this reason, I believe, that the PhD films engage with both, an intercultural quality in unknowingly searching for memory and place of origin, but also crucially the Surrealist practice, by involving the imagination - and through the myth-making practice -

transform the real-life events. Indeed, taking the view that knowledge lies in our body and memories lie in our senses presents an interesting domain in seeing how the triggering of senses by these haptic images not only links to our memories but also how it can function in the engagement with Surrealism. Furthermore, since the film medium can trigger a physical shock, it also has the “potential to disrupt the common-sense patterns of sense experience, making room for new cultural organizations of perception” (Marks, *SF* 195). Cinema can, therefore, be a place of new forms of sense knowledge, “produced in (or in spite of) the encounter between different cultures” (ibid.). This idea is reminiscent of Breton’s aim “to bewilder sensation” by the power of the Surrealist works to shock, which can consequently “aid the systematic derangement of all the senses” (*MS* 263), and thus activate the primordial, unique knowledge the Surrealists seek.

Chapter 2 also explored the role of the imagination in the mimetic relationship between the viewer and the film, and their embodied contemplation. For instance, *Ghosts* experimented with improvisation, collaboration and tactile images as a means of triggering the embodied viewing experience and shock the viewer. This chapter also identified the study of multisensory perception undertaken by Jan Švankmajer in his belief that touch can liberate the imagination. The numerous screenings of the films to audiences of diverse cultural, gender and national backgrounds helped assess, that the unique audience responses indeed suggested that original meanings of the films were created according to the individual viewers. The process of making these films, therefore, demonstrates immersion in the engagement with Surrealist practice, which revealed the uncanny and the marvellous, identified as the illogical sensory meanings, which

are unnerving by being both familiar and surprising. For example, the themes of fusing the imagined and real; outside and inside; personal history, nature; as well as illustrating the viewers themselves answer who is gazing or producing the film's meaning.

Furthermore, these films also contain the key themes identified by film theorists ascertaining the presence of the Surrealist quality in cinema, such as the contemplation of death, being on the margins, transmutations, gender and identity fluidity, and the frustration caused by the illogicality of dreams and horror. The PhD films often foreground the foreboding quality of nonsensical imagery, and as with the tendency of Jan Švankmajer, tend to lead the viewer's imagination towards fears and dreads. *Polednice*, *Blackbird*, *Nightmare on a Train* and *Mortido* are horror-fairy tales, exploring the sense of uncertainty and powerlessness. Furthermore, as discussed, *Blackbird* touches on the death drive principle. *The Secret Life of Moths* explores the changing relationship and different identities of the self. The films also attempted to illustrate the distortion of spaces and time, akin to dream or trauma, through the means of *mise-en-scène*. The irrationality of the images proved often to frustrate, induce anxiety, or lead to a childhood memory. Although, as highlighted at the beginning of this thesis, my work is not overly-concerned with attaching to it the label of Surrealism, it is however heavily influenced by the movement's concepts, practices and the work of other artists who are considered to be 'Surrealists'. The seven films that form the practical submission for this PhD highlight my passion for Surrealism, but also the difficulty in attempting to strictly pursue the Surrealists' aims without drifting in other directions. The films also propose that focusing on sensory knowledge, can provide an alternative perspective to that of logic, and be crucial

in the Surrealist film experience. Additionally, the thesis also employs references and examples to the often-ignored female Surrealists, who often explore the mind's inner workings to connect with the world or universe, in an attempt to free themselves. It proposes that there are strategies other than those formulated by Breton and that the radical and postmodern way of thinking is a liberating and useful avenue for anyone to reflect on a missing or uncertain identity or history.

Additionally, my films also record the journey of having only minimal experience in filmmaking, and illustrate the process of learning aspects of production, such as finding actors, locations, designing and building props, sets, costumes, operating the camera, sound recording, lights and importantly editing.

The culmination of this thesis and research has allowed reflection on the ways in which these films approach and evoke Surrealist strategies and themes, and this reflection has informed ideas for the focus of future projects. The notions of haptic visuality, Surrealist tactility and the role of embodied viewing are the key themes that will be further explored. As described in the appendix, I aim to experiment further with the use of collaborative experiments in the way films are exhibited and co-created with the audience. Furthermore, my interest in the altered state of mind experienced in the various stages of dreaming offers an interesting avenue for further exploration and experimentation. Therefore, the next film project I embark on will involve engaging with the practice of lucid dreaming and be informed by the scholar and artist Fariba Bogzaran.

Appendix

Gallery 36 Experiment

This experiment was an improvised two-day performance in 2011, in the Gallery 36 in Exeter, owned by the sculptress and painter, Veronica Gosling. The space was full of Gosling's artwork, described as her imagination, such as sculptures of various body parts made into lamps and furniture, and inspired the experiment. A friend and musician, Trever Hagen, who has been collaborator and composer of music for the PhD films, was on a stage improvising sounds on various instruments including a plastic tube and an old radio, producing improvised atmospheric soundscape. The visitors were told to sit anywhere, and the seats were positioned around the room, sometimes facing each other or the corner of the room. The room was dark except for randomly projected abstract visual images of extreme close-ups of Gosling's art, often blurry and distorted. The resulting experience was a surprising juxtaposition of visuals and sounds created on the spot in an experience that would never be translated by being recorded as a documentary. These unique moments included a disturbing synchronization of darkness with strange sound clashing into an enigmatic image, and sometimes an audience yelp was unexpected and shocking. The two forty-minute performances differed significantly, perhaps because of the different audiences. This experience was a crucial influence and template for the use of film set design in my practice. The purpose of the Gallery 36 exercise was to experiment with the atmosphere of the world of our imagination, and of the creative sharing of individual experiences in a collective.

The Role of Superimpositions

The use of the camera's lens can be manipulated to illustrate the eye and imagination's seeing. The experimental visual artist, Stan Brakhage, for example described his experiments with the camera and lenses, "by deliberately spitting on the lens or wrecking its focal intention, one can achieve the early stages of impressionism" (16). Brakhage also defines experimenting with slow motion, by "break[ing] up movement, in a way that approaches a more direct inspiration of contemporary human eye perceptibility of movement", as well as "inherit worlds of space" with the use of a handheld camera, but also describing how one can "over or under-expose the film" and "use the filters of the world, fog, downpours, unbalanced lights, neons with neurotic color temperatures, glass which was never designed for a camera" (ibid.).

Being on a low budget meant purchasing old second-hand lenses and finding them severely mouldy and affecting the image. This was an accidental but useful discovery, leading to altering all of the lenses, and using a variety of home-made filters to give the image a certain texture. Furthermore, these effects were also enhanced in the editing stage and led to an even greater desire to texture the images by further overlaying multiple superimpositions at the same time, changing their individual opacity, letting them by chance produce new images



Figure 77 *Nightmare on a Train*, the use of superimpositions.

and combining these different perspectives. Furthermore, the super 8 footage for *Polednice* was ruined during its development, and only a fragment (the wrongly exposed

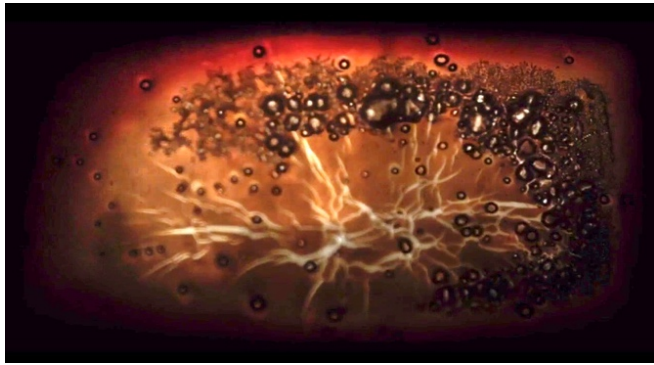


Figure 78 using burning film as a texture.



Figure 79 *Mortido*, filming through stained glass.



Figure 80 *Ghosts*, using 4 layers and smoke.

and jittery footage in red) was saved. However, this small fragment also became a signature image, along with the burning film footage, and was further used, as a texturing layer, in all of the PhD films. Another technique employed was filming through materials, such as water droplets or smoke, and also discovering that, for example, stained glass and lace, when covering the lens in out of focus, appear like smoke. For example, in shots from the music room in *Mortido*, the haze or smoke was

achieved by placing a white lace over my lens. Furthermore, the images of rocks, trees, clouds, sun flairs, but also motion captured as smudges (*Nightmare*) are applied as superimposed images over the films to transform the space, connect different times, illustrate the mind's intermingling with the material reality and give a new surprising meaning to the images. The soundscapes of the films are also similarly layered.

Storyboards

Polednice (other films employed chance and therefore did not use storyboards)

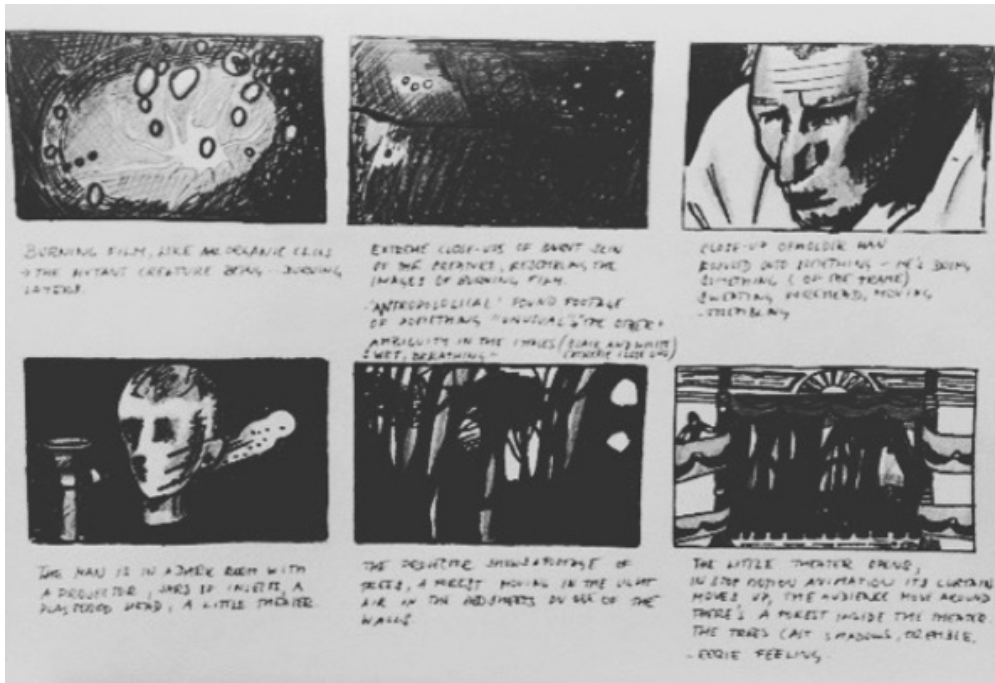


Figure 81 Polednice storyboard 1.



Figure 82 Polednice storyboard 2.



Figure 83 Polednice storyboard 3.



Figure 84 Polednice storyboard 4.

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